

## CHILE and PERU 2019

In September 2019 I spent 3 days at Junin Lake where Alain Guillemont saw twice a cat believed to be Andean Cat. I was with Alejandro Tello a birder guide from Lima used by Alain. In fact the more knowledgeable guide was Cezar a local from Ondores. We tried 2 places: Ondores where Alain Guillemont saw a cat in 20 and Palomayo where several persons saw 2 cats in 2018. Cezar showed me a photo of a cat of Palomayo which is a Colocolo. I was unlucky and didn't see anything. But at site of Ondores there was fresh rest of a rabbit and a lot of scats where Alain saw the cat (there was also signs of Eagle owl). It is true that Alejandro didn't organise anything as he promised me and as he didn't charter a taxi I was unable to do anything for the 2 first evenings. I didn't want to drive in Peru (the road Lima Junin is very dangerous). Cezar tried his best scanning all the time but I was very disappointed of Alejandro who most of the time was just waiting. And he was expensive! Cezar told me he knew another site with a cat, but more difficult to reach.

After reading the report of Jon Hall I didn't want to try again for Andean Cat, specially alone. Then the report of Ben Schwienhart encouraged me to buy a flight. But then after reading those of Janco Van Gelderen, Matt Andrews and Lennart Verheuve I was really not optimist. Later, one week before I left there to Chile there were bad news: strikes, violence, curfew, dead people... I was not sure to be able to do something.

In November 2019 I flew from Lima (Peru) to Tacna (Peru), then took a shared taxi to Arica in Chile. I had decided to spend 3 nights in Putre then to pick up a car at the airport. When I learnt that the day I had to pick up the car was a national strike day I changed my booking for 1 day later. Then in the afternoon I went to the Alcacran Peninsula (at the border of the town) where I saw a Marine Otter and 2 distant South American Sea Lions. It was my second time in north Chile. I spent only 1 night in Arica and then reached by bus Putre where I acclimatized for 3 full days. Then I returned to Arica to pick up a car at the airport, spent another night in Putre before driving to Parinacota, Chungara Lake, Guallatire and the Salar de Surire, all places above 4000m. By the end of the day I reached the Salar de Surire where I spent 2 nights. At this place, as mentioned by Ben Scheiwhart there is a colony of Mountain Viscachas behind the buildings of the Conaf. The colony is not very important, but they are more colonies higher up and also on the way to Surire village. I spotlighted 2 nights there seeing nothing except a Rex Molina's Hog Nosed Skunk. I saw also many Culpeos' scats behind the Conaf buildings and apparently 2 cats'scats. The last night there I also spotlighted until Guallatire again empty handed. Disappointed I left to Parinacota and Chungara. I spent 3 nights at the hospedaje in Parinacota. Each night I went spotlighting for a few hours. I saw 3 different Culpeos, a lot of Viscachas and the best of all, the first night an Andean Cat. I had to climb the slope of a mountain to approach it and have a better sighting. Finally the cat disappeared higher up. I returned there day and night the following days but never saw it again. The people of the area have already seen cats, but they told me always furtively. The area around Parinacota has hundreds of Viscachas. Like in Surire they mostly rest in the sun by day, but by night they are really active, often leaving the rocky areas to go sometimes more than 50m away to graze better "grass". Of course it is not really grass, I don't think that a cow would accept to eat this vegetation. And I must not forget the Vicuñas. They are extremely common in the altiplano. Another animal that I saw twice is Highland Tuco Tuco. I saw also 3 feral Donkeys between Chungara and Parinacota.

In the Putre area I saw a dead Viscacha and several times 2 herds of Northern Huemuls (Tarucas):

-A group of 6 visible from the village and appearing at the top of the mountain by 19h then descending lower down to graze Luzerne. They are north of the village. It included a nice male with antlers and a young one. It is where I saw a few more than 15 years ago.

-A group of 10 (including males with short antlers in velvet) along A 149 where they were mentioned by Janco and Jon. Again these animals come to graze Lucerne. But they come really close of the road and are not shy. I was told that by day they disappear in the canyon. I saw them twice by 7am.

On my last day after leaving Putre I stopped several times on the way to Arica, looking for Guanacos. I first saw 4 five minutes after leaving Putre. Then just before I reached the true desert I saw 9 close to the road. They were extremely tame. I don't think people hunt them. I remember on a former trip to see several from Putre itself. Arriving by 10h20am close to Arica I had saved time to look for Burmeister's Porpoise. Soon I saw 1 three times close to the mouth of the rio Lluta where Jon saw it. After I saw "another" one or the same at another viewpoint plus 2 South American Sea Lions. The dorsal fin of this porpoise is diagnostic. By 4pm I returned at the airport to drop the car, and fast left to Tacna in Peru. The following day was again national strike day and locals had told me to leave Chile as soon as possible the area if I wanted to get my flight from Tacna 2 days later.

As Ben Schwienhart mentioned the possibility to visit Punta Coles Reserve in Ilo (2,5h by bus from Tacna), looking on the net I found an email address where to ask a permit which is compulsory. I asked for the permit before leaving home but never received any answer. So I had 2 days to kill in Tacna (days I wanted to spend in Arica). I checked again, but no answer, then found a 2019 August report of a visit of Punta Coles, apparently no permit was necessary. I packed my stuff and jumped in the first bus. In Ilo the manager of my hotel explained me how to reach the reserve the following morning. The following day by 7am I reached the reserve, 8km from Ilo. But it was closed with a metallic gate and a wall. I sat down close to the sea and saw a close Marine Otter, 5 Bottle Nosed Dolphins and several South American Sea Lions. But there was a sign on the gate explaining that the reserve can only be visited with a permit and between 8am and 9h30 am. Bad luck. But I stayed there to see if I could see somebody opening the gate. It was not the case. By 8 or 8h30 a Peruvian guide with birders told me he had never been able to visit the reserve. By 9am a minibus arrived with children and their teacher. Again the teacher had no permit. By 9h30 a huge 4X4 with official staff of the Minister of Agriculture arrived and they finally allowed us to enter. This place has the largest colony of South American Fur Seals of Peru(1200). I had already seen this species twice in Ushuaia and once in Argentina, but I was interested to see a breeding colony. I saw more than 200: many females with their babies and a few males. There was also a colony of South American Sea Lions, but they don't mix with Fur Seals. Good end of the trip.

During my stay in altitude it was never very cold (minus 2 in the middle of the night and early morning before sunrise).

A great thanks for those, Jon Hall, Ben Schwienhart, Janco van Gelderen, Matt Andrews and Lennart Verheuvell who have seen or even not seen (it always help) Andean Cat and have posted their reports on Mammalwathing.

Dominique BRUGIERE

brugiere.dom@sfr.fr