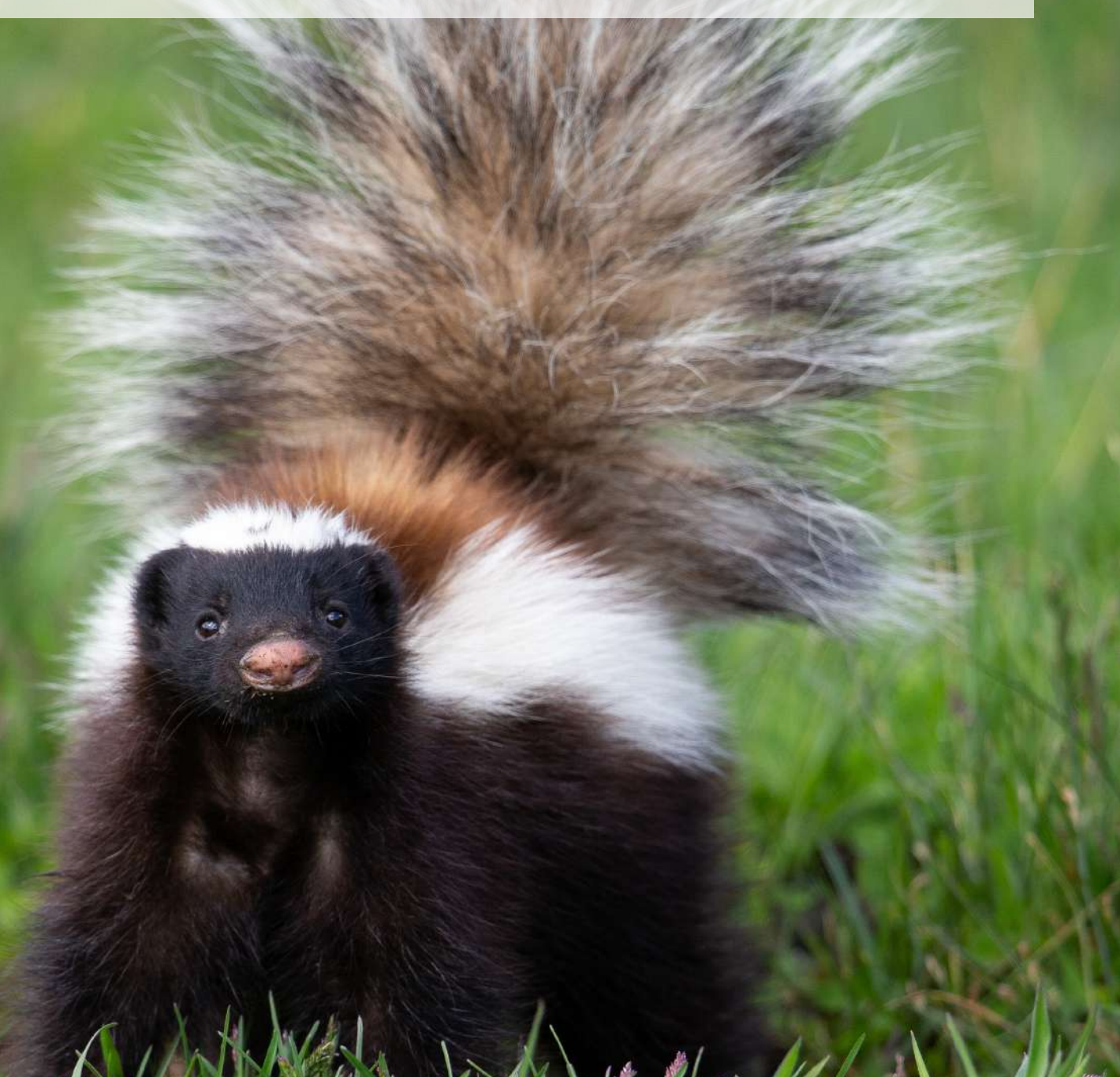


MAMMAL REPORT

ARGENTINA (PLUS SOUTHERN CHILE)
15 NOV 2019 - 25 APRIL 2020

54 Species, breakdowns, a proposal and COVID19



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C O N T E X T & L O G I S T I C S

My partner and I had planned to fly to South America and buy ourselves a van. In October of 2019 we made that happen by buying a 2005 Chevy Astro in Santiago de Chile. From there our plan was to head south into Patagonia, cross into Argentina and then head north until we ran out money.

This trip report was meant to be one of a series from each country visited, however as you will read, things didn't go to plan. The trip was not solely designed around seeing mammals, but as a wildlife photographer, we did target a few.

I have included sections of my Chile Report within this report (pages in grey), as it is likely that if you visit southern Argentina you will also visit southern Chile.

The report is written with the intention to help solo mammal watchers without guides. Big thanks to all previous trip reports, particularly Janco van Gelderen, Jon Hall, Keith Millar, Richard Webb, Steve Davis, Karen Baker, Regina Ribeiro & Tim Lieben.

Only sites where mammals were encounter will be mentioned.

All efforts were made to 'wild camp' during the trip, so no accommodation recommendations are made.

There is undoubtedly a few ID errors within this report, so feel free to contact me with any corrections or IDs.

Note on COVID-19:

Due to the world wide pandemic that eventuated during our time in Argentina, our overall South America trip was severely compromised. This lead to us spending a lot longer in Argentina than we had originally intended (worse places to be stuck, I know). However as travel was restricted we had to stop mammal watching and traveling all together. We were in lockdown in Salta for nearly 6 weeks weeks before catching a repatriation flight home to Melbourne. Unfortunately this resulted in missing several sites in the north of Argentina (not to mention our plans to visit Boliva, Peru and Ecuador).



Our route taken through Argentina and southern Chile

15 Nov 2019 - Ruta 40, between Bajo Caracoles and Gobernador Gregores

After one month in Chile, we had crossed over the border into Argentina at Paso Rabollas. Unfortunately for us, we were incredibly low on fuel, and we had been passed two closed petrol stations so we couldn't stop on our way to Gobernador Gregores. But, on the way we saw numerous **Guanacos** (*Lama guanicoe*) and two **South American Grey Foxes** (*Lycalopex griseus*). After refueling and a late dinner in Gobernador Gregores, we continued 70 km south to our camp on the shore of Lago Cardiel. On the night drive there we saw dozens of **European Hares** (*Lepus europaeus*).

16 - 21 Nov 2019 Los Glacier National Park

This is a large park with a north and south section. Our first visit within the national park was to the adventure town of El Chalten in the north. Our plan was to do a nice long hike up to one of the Alpine lakes. Unfortunately, the weather had other plans, thick fog, rain and snow prevented us from our hike. We waited for 3 days but the weather didn't clear. Driving the road north out of town we saw many road signs for the Southern Huemul, we looked many times and even spot lit a section of the road one evening, but turned up nothing but **European Hares**. We decided to give up and go to the southern section of the park, Marino Glacier. On the drive we saw a few small flocks of **Guanacos**. Our camp (-50.404734, -72.718817) was just outside the national park entrance, this spot gave stunning views of the mountains and it was dry! Upon arriving I went on a quick walk with my camera looking for birds. About 200 m out of the camp I spotted my first new mammal in a week, the **Patagonia Hog-nosed Skunk** (*Conepatus humboldtii*). This was a species I had wanted for a long time. It was smaller than I expect and it's fur looked incredibly soft. It allowed for close approach before doing a quick threat display and running off. The area was very open so I decided to go back to camp to get my partner, hoping to show her. Sure enough, when we returned to the approximate location, it was still foraging for food and we were able to watch it for about 30 mins (4:30 - 5:00 pm).



Patagonian Hog-nosed Skunk with tis tail in the wind.

A short night walk in the light rain produced nothing but **hares**. The next day we went into the National Park to visit the glacier. I highly recommend doing this, as the glacier is absolutely stunning and you can watch ice carve off its face all day. When we got back to our car in the late afternoon, there was a **Culpeo** (*Lycalopex culpaeus*) hanging around the car park.



A sly Culpoe in the lower car park at Perito Moreno Glacier

Back at camp that evening, a walk turned up the **Patagonian Hog-nosed Skunk** again, in a similar location (9:00 pm). Photo opps weren't as good but I had great views. From here we headed towards the Chilean border with lots of **Guancos** and **Hares** on the way.



The aw-inspiring Perito Moreno Glacier - a highlight!

22 - 27 Nov 2019 - Torres del Paine National Park

After spending a little over a week in Argentina we were back in Chile and heading towards Torres del Paine National Park. This park is characterized by its jaw dropping geology and as one of the best places in the world to see a wild puma. After arriving at the park and paying 21,000 peso per person entry fee, we found out that seeing a puma on our own (let alone photographing it) was going to be difficult. The walk between Laguna Amarga entrance and Lago Sarmiento entrance (which is where Pumas are known to be seen), can only be walked with a guide and only in one direction! We asked at the Laguna Amarga entrance how one would get back to their vehicle after completing the walk and she just replied that it is a problem... The next best way to see a puma would be to drive the loop road that goes around the trail and dips in and out of the park, but on the national park side of this, stopping on the road is prohibited and walking on the road is a big no-no. So after learning all that info we had to formulate a new plan. We decided to forget about pumas for the next day and head to the west of the park. This was mainly for sight seeing but we also wanted to try find Southern Huemul. We searched the roads all the way to Lago Grey (highly recommend visiting for the icebergs in the lake), but came up empty handed. The only mammal seen here was a small rodent that had been caught by an Austral Pygmy Owl, not sure I can be identified.



Deceased Rodent - feel free to ID

The next we went to Pehoe camp, as we had heard a Huemul tends to hang around. The store clerk at the camp told one does live in the area, but couldn't give me anymore details. I walked the trails around the camp with no deer in sight. I ran into a tour guide who was also searching for the deer, he said he had seen it where I was last week, and yesterday at Hotel Explora but not there today. He said that the deer is relatively easy to find and see, but we had no such luck. If I was to return, I would spent more time between the camp and the hotel searching. That afternoon we were back in Eastern side of the park, a **Fox** species was seen on the way. Our camp for the night was at the Laguna Armaga entrance, I sat out the back of the van with a beer and the camera set up, scanning the hills to the south. Several small groups of **Guanacos** came through but no pumas. At 7pm we set off on an evening drive, with pumas in mind. We first went counter- clockwise around the loop, driving slowly and scanning the hills. Less than 3km from the entrance and we saw a **Patagonian Hog-nosed Skunk** wandering around in the grasslands. It was quite a way from the road and we had got some great pictures in Argentina the previous week so we kept moving. We turned left on the Y-150 towards the Lago Sarmiento entrance, still searching. Upon reaching the entrance, we wanted to check with the ranger if we could leave and re-enter later that evening, he said it was no problem. As I was walking away he mentioned something about a puma in Spanish, I questioned him on it and he said around 10 minutes prior someone had shown him a picture they had just taken of a mother with 3 cubs on the road we had just driven. So we decided to turn around and try that section again. No luck, so once again we went east on the Y-150. Once we were outside of the park, we saw some cars pulled over on the side of the road, we stopped and saw a group of people a kilometer or so up the hill. Upon inspection through the camera, they were wildlife photographers and were set up in front of a decent sized cave. Figuring that this must be a puma den, we watched from the road. I very much wanted to go up the hill, or return early the next morning, but it is private property (albeit no fence) and we did not have permission, so I can not recommend entering this site. The photographers eventually dispersed and we couldn't tell if they had already seen the puma or if it didn't show, either way we had certainly missed it. We continued a little further along the Y-150 until we saw a **Culpeo** on the northern side of the road, we stopped and found that there was also a den with at 3 pups peeking out.



Culpeo with 3 pups (1 out of frame) peering out of their den.

22 - 27 Nov 2019 - Torres del Paine National Park (cont.)

We turned around and went back the same way we had come, it was getting dark but kept scanning. Eventually at around 10pm we made it back to camp, no puma, ready for bed. The next morning we woke early with the intention to do the drive again, however heavy rain had set in and it continued through the day. We decided to leave the park that day and head back to Puerto Natales for the night to stock up in fuel and food. Upon returning to the park the following evening (no need to buy a new ticket), we did much the same thing, drove around looking for pumas and looked for Huemul at Pehoe Camp. Once again we couldn't locate either. On the last evening we also checked the road to Laguna Azul. The first half of this road is perfect habitat for pumas and was filled with **Guanacos** and there fresh babies. We thought this was promising, so we staked out a large herd as the sun set. It was really nice watching the interactions within the group but in the end there was no action. On our way out of the park that night we came across two baby **Guanacos** stuck in a wire fence. We were able to approach them, despite loud protests from the parent, and free the struggling young. While driving, especially through Argentina, we had seen far too many dead **Guanacos** caught in fences - not a pleasant (or natural) way to die.



Very fresh Guanacos, closely guarded by their mothers.

Just south of Cerro Castillo, around 10pm, I spotted a small shape zipping across the road, I yelled "Armadillo!" and we pulled over. Ecstatic to finally see **Big Hairy Armadillo** (*Chaetophractus villosus*), I didn't really know what to do. It had frozen on the other side of the road, while I took some photos. I hadn't expected to see anything on the drive back so I still had the teleconverter on my camera (at 700mm) and it was getting close to dark, hence the photos are terrible. There was a car approaching from one direction and I was worried about it running out onto the road. As the car went passed it decided to run up the hill and under a fence into a paddock. Not being content with my photos, I decided to go after it. This was a stupid idea, as the Armadillo could run very fast, I could keep up but I couldn't do anything to stop it running, including trying to catch it (not recommended). Eventually, after I looked like a fool zigzagging through a paddock, it dived into a hole and I was left breathless, literally.



The best shot I could manage of Big Hairy Armadillo.

22 - 27 Nov 2019 - Torres del Paine National Park (cont.)

Although we were unsuccessful with our hunt for the puma (and huemul), I believe that driving that circuit is the best way to find one on your own, you just need time, luck and fair bit of fuel. If you are interested in doing the walk between Lago Sarmiento and Lago Amarga, the only people within the park that we could find to organise a guide are at the information center at hotel Las Torres. This is, however, just a walk and does not focus on looking for pumas and it costs an arm and a leg. With the power of hindsight, and if we had a bit more money, we would have organised a proper puma tour, nevertheless we tried our hardest.



The stunning Torres del Paine at sunset. Worth visiting for this alone.

28 Nov - 7 Dec 2019 - Punta Arenas area

After passing through Punta Arenas we spotted a pod of dolphins in the very calm sea. We pulled over and took some photos, although difficult to tell, we suspect they were **Peale's Dolphin** (*Lagenorhynchus australis*). This road is supposed to be particularly good for both dolphins and whales, it also leads to the furthest most south road on the mainland continent of South America.

As we were leaving our camp the next day, our van broke down, this led to a long series of events which resulted in us being stuck in Punta Arenas for about a week.

7 Dec 2019 - Punta Arenas - Porvenir Ferry

After finally sorting out our car troubles, we were back on the road, or rather the ocean. We were catching the ferry from Punta Arenas to Porvies (Tierra del Fuego) on a very grey Saturday afternoon. The sea was much calmer than previous days and I was looking forward to a few new mammals and birds. Before the ferry even set off I saw a small group of seals swim by the boat, a bit hard to tell which species. 15 mins into our first cetaceans, **Peale's dolphin**, finally some picture proof! The middle of the journey was not very productive, even for birds. As we arrived into Porvies, another group of **Peales Dolphins** briefly joined the boat's wake. All in all not a very productive ferry ride, but I suppose it comes down to luck, conditions and time of year.



Finally a snap of Peale's Dolphin

9 - 10 Dec 2019 - Karukinka Natural Park

This is quite a remote, private park in the south of Chilean Tierra del Fuego, basically as far south as you can get in Chile. Tierra del Fuego has alright potential for mammals, but is probably best known for its invasive species (American Beaver, Muskrat and American Mink). One that we were quite keen to find was American Beaver, which are supposed quite easy to find within the park.

Unfortunately we were burdened with sickness, this time with the flu, so we were unable to spend a lot of time looking for mammals, and we were keen to get some medicine in Argentina. Despite this, we had heard a section of the Y-85 (-54.45881, -68.70533) had plenty of dams, so we decided to check it out. There were indeed plenty of dams, and we spent an hour or two checking them out but with no luck, although it was the middle of the day.

While driving out of the park, we lucked out and found an **American Beaver** (*Castor canadensis*) just by the side of the road, next to a culvert drain (-54.262279, -68.735761). I managed to get some quick pictures out of the car window before it slid back into drain. It had blocked the culvert off with mud and redirected the water into a field. Not a great place to make it's home but I suppose there is a lot of competition in the area. I assume this species does quite a bit of ecological damage to the rivers, but I was quite pleased to see this species for the first time. **Guanacos** were also very common within the park.

From here we crossed the worlds most southerly border crossing into Argentinian Tierra del Fuego



American Beaver in the grass on the side of the road.

Once crossing back into Argentina, we spent a few days getting better in the port/tourist town of Ushuaia, the end of the world. This is also the closest town to Tierra del Fuego National Park, our next stop. The first day I checkout the Senda del la Baliza trail in the South West of the park. There is an active beaver dam along this trail, and so I waited by it for a bit and sure enough I briefly saw an **American Beaver** sliding throw the mud. Moving up along the creek I saw another mammal by the side of the water which I thought was another beaver, on closer inspection it turned out to be a **Muskrat** (*Ondatra zibethicus*), another new, but introduced, species for the list.

I reached the ocean at the end of the trail and saw a mammal surface in the water. It surfaced again and I snapped a few pics, it turned out to be a large **South American Sea Lion** (*Otaria flavescens*).



A Muskrat very close to the beaver dam on Senda del la Baliza

The only other mammals we saw withing the park were some small rodents on the Senda Costera trail. The were chocolate brown, with small ears and short tails, but I couldn't get any photos.

13 - 15 Dec 2019 - Teirra del Fuego National Park (Cont.)

Although we had been to some fantastic places in Patagonia, I really connected with this park. Especially the coastal trails. I found it so special that I decided to propose to my partner on our last night in the park Senda del la Baliza trail.



She said yes... thank god!

Dec 18 2019 - Bahia Azul to Punta Delgada ferry

On our last day in Chile for this year (2019), we had to cross the ferry from Bahia Azul to Punta Delgada. We had woken up in Argentina near Rio Grande, crossed into Chile, and then we needed to pass through Chile to once again enter Argentina and start our journey north.

We boarded the ferry around 4pm, with intermittent rain and white caps on the sea. However none of it mattered because we were able to have absolutely stunning views of, in my opinion, the coolest dolphin in the world, **Commerson's Dolphin** (*Cephalorhynchus commersonii*). A pod of about 12 were present around the ferry for about 80% of the journey. Silly me, I still had my teleconverter on my camera, so photos were actually a bit tough, I recommend 200-400mm range, not 700mm! Regardless this was the perfect way to end 2 months in Chile, a country I truly love.



Commerson's Dolphin jumping out of the water besides the ferry.

Back in Argentina, we were heading north up the Atlantic coast. Our second stop, (after the highly recommended Cabo Virgenes Penguin Reserve) was a section of land just south of Parque national Monte Leon. The first night we camped by an abandoned homestead on Ruta 57 (-50.760274, -69.433279). I went on a walk through the steppe in the late afternoon and found what I thought was Armadillo burrows, I marked them on my GPS to return at night. Once it was finally dark around 11pm I went for a spotlight. The first mammal I encountered was a **European Hare**, dozens of them present. Next, was a **South American Grey Fox** hunting White-bellied Seedsnipes, I ran into him a few times. After visiting all the burrows I had marked there was no sign of Armadillo. Two small rodents were seen, one allowed very close approach and it was later identified to be **Bunny Rat** (*Reithrodon auritus*). As I was photographing the rat, a **Patagonian Hog-nosed Skunk** wandered by, I was still focused on the rat so I didn't get any photos.



The very cute Bunny Rat sat perfectly still while I photographed it.

The next day we headed north to the parks actual entrance, you have to sign in at the information center 6km north of the entrance and the park can't be accessed after/during rain. On the extremely windy drive there, we spotted a **Big Hairy Armadillo** on the side of the road. We pulled over as quickly as we could and I ran back to where it was, it had made its way up into the bushes but I had excellent views for about 30 seconds.



A curious Big Hairy Armadillo

Once in the park, we went straight to the **South American Sea Lion** colony on the coast. A short board walk allows you to look down on the colony, there were around 100 the day we visited. Next, we did the 5km walk to the Magellanic Penguin colony, lots of signs on the walk warning about Pumas and the trail is only allowed to be walked between 9am - 5pm due to the concern of puma attracts. Apparently this is the only place in the world where Pumas regularly predate on penguins. Alas there was no pumas for us on the middle of the day.



South American Sea Lion colony

After dinner we decided to go for an evening drive through the park to the entrance, then back to the campsite. The drive to the entrance was relatively uneventful, with **Guanacos** and **European Hares** the only mammals, a close up of Elegant Crested Tinamou made up for it. On the drive back to camp we made out way off the steppe and followed a dry river canyon back towards the sea. About halfway back, I stopped the car to look at what I originally thought was a Caracara in a bush, across the river canyon. Upon lifting my camera I was in shock to see that it was actually a **Puma's** head (*Puma concolor*)!!! It was sitting with it's body in cover and it's face catching the last of the sun. It was a long way away and it was a miracle I spotted it! I disembarked the car to get close to my side of the canyon, almost immediately the massive cat got up and moved out of sight. We sat and waited for about 30 mins and it showed it's face again, this time behind more bushes and staring directly at us, and then back to cover. After a while we decided to leave, upon starting the engine of the car, the Puma appeared again, this time breaking cover fully and walked across the hill and away from us. We got some distant, but incredible, views of this gorgeous cat. With all our targets for the park seen, we decided to head out of park.

All in all this was quite a productive area given we were here for less than 48 hours, I suggest further exploration of this seldom visited park.



A stunning Puma blends in perfectly with its surroundings.

This is a beautiful national park that we visited on a hot December day. It has potential for Puma, Geoffroy's Cat and, unbeknownst to us, Patagonian Mara. On the drive into and out of the park along Ruta 49, we saw in total 16 **Patagonian Mara** (*Dolichotis patagonum*) on the side of the road, between 5km and 36km from Ruta 3. This was a big surprise as I wasn't expecting to find this species until Peninsula Valdez. They allowed relatively close approach and I manage some alright pictures given it was around midday. This national park is free and very interesting regardless of it's mammal potential, as it is known for 150 million year old petrified trees. No camping is allowed in the park and it is open 9am - 7pm in the high season. **Guanacos** were common throughout the drive.



A male and female Patagonian Mara. They were almost always seen in pairs.

The same day we headed north to the **South American Sea Lion** colony (-46.489161, -67.481833) just south of Caleta Olivia. This colony is right on the beach and there was about 150 South American Sea Lions relaxing and sleeping. I, stupidly, went onto the beach to get some photos. I didn't disturb any of the sea lions and kept a safe distance, but on the way back to the car I saw that there is a sign saying not to go on the beach, we had parked just passed it, hence I missed it. Honest mistake, now you all know. If in the area, it's well worth stopping by to watch these beautiful creatures from the comfort of your car in the car park, I highly recommend a stop for lunch.



A rufous coloured Sea Lion sleeps ontop of other Sea Lions.

That evening we camped 2km south of the colony on the old highway, between Ruta 3 and the coast. After dinner we had a **Southern Mountain Cavy** (*Microcavia australis*) come passed the car a couple of times. A walk up and down the road produced several more. I would say this is a reliable spot if your are after this species, as the were active most of the next day too.



Southern Mountain Cavy was shy but approachable

28 - 30 Dec 2019 Playa Isla Escondida

After Christmas and some more car repairs in Comodoro Rivadavia, we continued north. While driving along Ruta 3 (-44.04446, -65.968583) a tiny **Pichi** (*Zaedyus pichiy*) ran across the highway in front of us. We were going around 120km/h and we just missed hitting it! We pulled over and I got out to try find it but no luck. This was our first alive Pichi after seeing 2 dead much further south on Ruta 3.

Our camp for the night was the beach at Playa Isla Escondida, a known **Southern Elephant Seal** (*Mirounga leonina*) colony. At this time of year numbers are low, but we saw 7 Elephant Seals on our first afternoon, a real delight! Washed up on the rocks was also a diseased **Burmeister's Porpoise** (*Phocoena spinipinnis*).



Southern Elephant Seal portrait (left) and the diseased porpoise.

28 - 30 Dec 2019 Playa Isla Escondida (Cont.)

The dunes near our camp had many **Southern Mountain Cavy** but they were much more shy than the other sites we had seen them. A short night walk only produced a Hare and some very small rodents I couldn't photograph.

In the morning we left, I got out of the car to pee and I saw a mammal running across the dunes ~50m away. "Holy shit, that's looks like a Grison" I said, I grabbed my camera and ran it's direction, it showed again very briefly and I held down the shutter button. I continued after it but could not locate it, it possibly went into a burrow. Once I got back I looked at the terrible photos and indeed it was a **Lesser Grison** (*Galictis cuja*), a very cool mammal to leave on, even if it was at a distance.



I know these photos are not very clear (and hugely cropped), but I got a good look at the animal before I got the camera and in the last few photos you can see the dark underside.

On the drive out we opted to take Ruta 1 north instead of heading straight back to the highway, this was a good choice as there was quite a lot of wildlife. The only mammals were **Guanacos**, **Southern Mountain Cavy** and **Hare**, but it would be interesting give this a drive at night.

This location is another **Southern Elephant Seal** colony which was a bit more active than the previous one. There were about 30 Elephant Seals on the shore and in the water. This location differs from the last in the respect that you can watch the seals from way above on the cliff face or down on the beach, and it is also a possibility to both Orcas and Southern Right Whales from here, albeit it was the wrong time of year for the whales. We were hoping to see Orcas so I set up on the cliff face and waited for high tide. After an hour, a thick sea fog rolled in which completely blocked my view down to the beach, so I called it quits.



A before and after of the view out to sea. The sea fog made it impossible to look for Orcas.

The next morning I was out on the cliff at 8am, as the tide rose around 60 **Elephant Seals** lounged on the beach, a few **South American Sea Lions** came by too. After a couple of hours of no action, we decide to make our way down the cliff to the beach for a close look. We had only been down there about 10 mins when we saw a large fin on the horizon, an **Orca** (*Orcinus orca*)! We stayed on the beach for a while as two **Orcas** cruised the coast. We didn't get amazing views, so we decided to head back up to the cliff. Luckily the **Orcas** were coming back passed our location and we were able to get some fantastic views. There was no attacks on the seals though. A great mammal to end 2019 with.



Female Orca, the male never came as close to shore, but could be seen from much further away.

We had fully planned on going to the Valdez Peninsula for 2 - 3 nights, even though we had seen all our target target species. But upon arrival to the ticket booth, we were informed it was not possible to free camp on on the peninsula, anywhere. As it was 2pm on New Year's Eve, everything was fully booked and it was very busy. We could have gone in for the afternoon but decided against it as the admission fee was a bit steep. So regrettably we turn around and left.

1 - 3 Jan 2020 - El Condor

We visited the lovely coastal town of El Condor with the hope of seeing La Plata Dolphin. We found the locations to look for the dolphins but it was New year's day and the banks of the river were packed with locals. We tried another 2 high tides but with no luck. This was our first real mammal dip for Argentina. But it was still well worth visiting this town for the 50,000 strong colony of Burrowing Parrots.

5 Jan 2020 - Pigue

While coming into the town of Pigue on RP 67, a small mammal that I could only describe as a **Pichi**, crossed the road in front of us. Of course we stopped the car and got out to look for it but could not locate it in the long grass. According to the literature, this location is outside (albeit not by much) the distribution of Pichi, but I am quite certain that is what it was.

12 - 14 Jan 2020 - El Palmar National Park

After a very relaxing and beer-filled days in the city of Rosario, we eventually made our way to El Palmar National Park. This is a very easy to access national park, which is frequented by many tourists, especially in the summer months - which it was when we visited. We arrived mid morning on a Sunday, paid our entry (400 peso/person), and already it was too hot. The drive in the access road provided at least a dozen **Capybara** (*Hydrochoerus hydrochaeris*), they were very common in the roadside ditches filled with water throughout the park, with hundreds seen each day. We also stopped at a small water body on the right of the entry road (-31.872715, -58.237375), a male **Chital** (*Axis axis*) with a large set of antlers bounded off into the scrub.



Capybara, by far the most common mammal within the park, but very awesome to see for the first time.

12 - 14 Jan 2020 - El Palmar National Park (Cont.)

We did a bit of a scout of the ruins/playa road, as well as Camino Arroyo El Palmar road but it was too hot so we went back to camp and had lunch at the restaurant. After an afternoon siesta, we went back out to do more scouting and see if we could do any spotlighting. On our scouting mission, we drove all of the remaining roads and did a few of the shorter trails. While driving towards the entrance we stopped at a small wetlands area (-31.869108, -58.245485) along the main road. It was full of **Capybara** and, to our surprise, a very shy **Coypu** (*Myocastor coypus*). With it's thick tail visible as it moved through the water. Next we went along Camino Arroyo El Palmar towards the lookout. In a group of **Capybara** was a lone **Pampas Fox** (*Lycalopex gymnocercus*), looking very hot. We got to the end of the road and I got out to do the short trail. It was nice but no mammals. When I returned to the car park a small crowd had formed and I found them watching a pair of **Crab-eating Foxes** (*Cerdocyon thous*). People were being stupid and trying to feed them but the Foxes weren't too interested and moved on after a while. On our way out (around 7:45 pm) a barrier had been put across the road to prevent anyone going up at night.



Pampas Fox (left) and Crab-eating Fox (right) on our first afternoon within the park.

We drove to the end of Camino La Glorieta to wait for it get dark, there was no barrier across this road and several people enjoying the sunset in the car park. Around 8:45pm, the ranger arrived to usher everyone to leave so we left first and tried to spotlight back. With headlights behind us it was difficult to get much spotlighting done, and thus it was not a very successful trip. At the junction with the camp road, two **Crab-eating Foxes** were seen, one of them had a toad in its mouth. As we arrived back to the camping/restaurant area, we found the lawns were covered with **Plains Viscacha** (*Lagostomus maximus*). We parked in the camp site and went to take some photos.

The **Viscacha** were relatively tame, and we could get frame filling photos with anything from 200-500mm lens. Also on the grassy area was an **Crab-eating Fox**, which was hunting frogs around a flooded area. It was successful when it found a large toad (clearly common prey for the Foxes here, they were incredibly abundant). It carried the toad away and then placed it down. It proceeded to wack its own head on the toad, in order to kill it. It was quite an audible whack, a very strange thing to watch. After a while it slinked off with the, presumed dead, toad in mouth. A large group of **Capybara** also visited the flood area while we were photographing some frogs.



A Crab-eating Fox - mid-smash.



The intriguing look Plains Viscacha

The next morning I was up at 6:00am to see the sunrise over Uruguay on the other side of the river. It was a cool and clear morning. A couple of **Viscachas** were still at the entrance of their burrows but otherwise not a lot of mammal activity. By 7:30am we were on the road with our first stop being the bridge on Los Loros road. We sat in the van eating breakfast, waiting to see if anything would arrive. It wasn't long before a **Crab-eating Fox** strutted across the bridge, then quickly back into the bushes. After that, a small snake made its way across the road, photographing it took up at least 30 mins of bridge watching time. By 9am we decided to keep moving, as we crossed over the bridge I spotted a **Wild Boar** (*Sus scrofa*) a few meters in from the road. Our next stop was the Yatay trail off Camino La Glorieta. This is a short but beautiful trail that winds through the Yatay palms. The sandy track had several cat paw prints, as well as a fresh dove kill - we decided we would try to spotlight it at night.

In the afternoon we had planned to stakeout the bridge on Los Loros again, however there were a few families fishing and swimming in the creek (not allowed) so we figured we needn't waste our time. On the drive back to the main road we saw a group of around 5 baby **Wild Boar**.

Next we went back to the Yatay trail for the remainder of the afternoon. In total I did the loop slowly and quietly 5 times. The first loop I got a **Six Banded Armadillo** (*Euphractus sexcinctus*), the second loop a brief glimpse at a **Brown (Gray) Brocket** (*Mazama gouazoubira*). Third, the same armadillo in roughly the same spot. Forth, a Crab-eating Fox at the end/start of the trail. After this it was dark, and we decided to leave. Shortly after leaving we saw some very cat like eyeshine in the bushes, it looked perfect for Geoffrey's Cat, we followed it in the car until we could get a look at it, to our disappointment, it was a **Crab-eating Fox** pup. As we hadn't seen the ranger we decided to do the loop drive again and give the Yatay trail one more go. For the fifth and final loop for the night (now actually dark) I found a **Nine Banded Armadillo** (*Dasypus novemcinctus*) scratching through the forest floor, however it was near impossible to get a clean shot. When I approached the car I also scared another **Brown Brocket Deer** - still no photos.

As we were leaving we could hear the rangers car coming, we kept in front but we didn't spotlight at all on the way out. Finally, as we turned into to camp road (the ranger far behind us) I court the glimpse of an animal among a group of **Capybara** in the headlights, I dismissed it as a fox but when I got the torch on it I saw a beautiful **Geoffroy's Cat** (*Leopardus geoffroyi*) slinking off into the bush! We had completely lucked out! Unfortunately we lost it pretty quickly and didn't get any photos but we were very happy to get our main target in the park. Just before reaching camp there was a herd of **Chital** in the bushes.

The next day we thought we deserved a sleep in and didn't rise until around 9am. Already hot, we decided to make tracks and leave the park. A fantastic mammal location!

This lovely park is on border with Brazil in the Province of Misiones. Entry is 250 pesos per person but is only collected between 9am and 5:30pm, outside of this there is no one at the pay booth but there are still rangers present within the park. We elected to camp 7km from the park entrance (although still within the bounds of the park) at a view point (-27.123625, -53.946419). In the evening I went for a short spotlight up the road. There were a few night birds out and while I was photographing a nightjar, a **Nine-banded Armadillo** wandered out of the forest onto the roads edge. It was moving quite fast so photos were average, but it didn't seem to care I was there.

The next morning we were up with the sun and heading to the entrance of the park. We ran into a ranger on a quad bike before the entrance, he said it was fine if we went in. Upon arriving in the car park there was a family of **Brazilian Cavy** (*Cavia aperea*) running around northern edge. And before parking the car we saw our second new mammal for the day, a family of **South American Coati** (*Nasua nasua*) trying to raid the trash cans.



Nine-banded Armadillo (left) walking through the grass on the road side and Brazilian Cavy (right) in the carpark.

Mainly with birds on my mind, I started on the Chachi Trail to the north of the visitors center. It wasn't long before I saw another mammal though, this time a **Collared Pecary** (*Pecari tajacu*) that I accidentally startled. Near the lookout at the end of the trail, an **Azara's Agouti** (*Dasyprocta azarae*) crossed in front of me and froze, it stayed still for quote a few minutes while I got some photos, before slinking off into the forest.



Azara's Agouti on the forest floor

This park is also home to the Mocona Falls, a 3km (depending on rain) stretch of falls on the Brazilian border. The only way to view the falls from the Argentinian side is to take a short boat trip, which is what the majority of people in the park are there to do (I didn't see anyone else on the trail). The boat ride is 900 pesos/person and is quite fun, no mammals but a nice tourist ride.

This park is very under-visited with good mammal potential. It can only be reached by car (and if it's rained, only 4WD) but it is free to enter and camp. There is one 4.2 km loop trail through the forest, the first 2 km is on a narrow car track, and the last 2.2 km through dense fern forest on single trail. The majority of the spotlighting I did was on the first 2 km, the rangers didn't seem to have a problem with me spotlighting.

Once dusk set in, I went out on the trail and not long after I started I found a very small rodent racing around the forest floor. It was hopping and had a hairless tail, that's about all I can say about it. Further down the trail, around 600m out of camp, I spotted an **Opossum** climbing through the mid canopy. It disappeared but was heading my direction, I found it again in the tree above the trail, but it soon went back to the original tree. I started squeaking and it finally stopped. The only clear view of it was from directly below, but I managed to keep it looking with continued squeaking. It was white all over (or the parts I could see), metallic purple ears and structurally it was very similar to Australia's Eastern Ring-tailed Possum. I had no idea what it was but after a quick Google search I identified it as **Brown-eared Woolly Opossum** (*Caluromys lanatus*), a really cool animal!



One of the coolest looking South American marsupials in my opinion!

Back in camp I was just about to climb into the van for the night when I spotted some dull eyeshine across the grass. I was wrapped to see it was a **Tapeti** (*Sylvilagus brasiliensis*), the endangered rabbit of the rainforest. It was extremely light shy, always trying to hide behind something. I turned my torch down to it's lowest setting and I was able to approach quite close, although a red light would have been ideal.



The Tapeti, Argentina's only native Lagomorph.

The next day we did the full 4.2 km trail in the afternoon. The walk was mammal-less but we did find two very fresh and large excavations in the red soil. I suspect an armadillo but we never found the the culprit.

Once again in the evening I went spotlighting along the trail but before I left we found the **Tapeti** just behind our car. There was also another one only 100m down the trail, looks like this is a good location for **Tapeti**. The forest that night was full of sounds, mammal and otherwise, but spotting things was quite difficult through the bamboo and ferns. The small hopping rodent was more prevalent than the previous night, with about 6 seen. The only other mammal I saw was a large rat perched in the bamboo making alarm calls at me. It was later identified to be **Atlantic Bamboo Rat** (*Kannabateomys amblyonyx*), makes sense!



An Atlantic Bamboo Rat doing what it does best.

After returning to camp I decided to try the start of the other end of the trail, this passes a small dammed creek where the camp gets its water. As I approached I noticed a mammal in the water. I immediately thought it was a Yapok but soon realised it was a large rodent, I haven't been able to identify it yet so feel free to let me know if you recognize it. A mammal watcher with some small mammal traps and a thermal camera could do very well in this park.



A yet to be identified rat. I could just be a black rat but it was in the middle of the forest.

This is another small and rarely visited park, although with much easier access. The entrance is located just off route 14 and once again entry and camping is free. There is a series of trails which I got hopelessly lost on in my evening spotlighting. The trails dip in and out of valleys, mostly in bamboo and enclosed forests. I was on what I thought was a loop trail when I saw a **Big-eared Opossum** (*Didelphis aurita*) In a bamboo thicket, it sat still the whole time but was in a terrible location for photos. Only a couple of meters further down the trail and it became too overgrown so I had to turn around, which was a bit frustrating.



Big-eared Opossum buried in a tree

On the way back I saw 3 very small grey **rodents**, they had hairless tails that were around a third longer than their body and they appeared to have their eyes closed as they rummaged through the leaf litter. They were extremely hard to photograph with my camera, but I did manage a phone pic of one that had crawled up to my shoe. Unfortunately I could not identify them.



I would love an ID on this rodent if possible.

This park is a large park with massive biodiversity. I believe all of the areas mammals are present within the park, including the two big cats. It is free entry with free camping and has two trails starting from the information center, one either side of the road. We had heard that there was a salt lick that is frequented by Tapir, among other mammals, as well as some world class birding.

We arrived on a terribly rainy Thursday afternoon. After talking to the rangers, we established that Tapirs don't come to the salt lick after rain, which was bummer. Still, I decided to head out onto the southern trail at night. I walked about 1km and turned around to come back, didn't see any animals. I crossed the road to the northern trail and immediately found the salt lick, with a small "observation tower" above it to watch from. I saw a nice owl but this was my first mammal-less spotlighting night in Misiones.

The next morning we were up with the sun and again on the south trail. This time we completed the 3.4km loop which ended back in the camp. No mammals but a nice walk. Around 3:30pm I decided to stake out the salt lick from the observation tower. As I arrived at the tower a few things scattered, possibly an agouti and a pecary, I thought this to be a good sign. Once set up I heard some movement in the bamboo around 30m away. I watched for a bit and a **Black Capuchin** (*Sapajus nigritus*) appeared with a baby on its back. It was in dense bamboo but soon I heard a few others quietly moving through the trees. One moved right in front of the tower, albeit in some terrible light, and I got great views. This was our first South American primate and our first mammal for Urugua-i.



A curious Black Capuchin

By 7:00pm nothing else had arrived and I had finished my book, it was time for some food. Whilst around camp having dinner, I noticed a small **rodent** racing out of the forest edge to collect crumbs, I set up and waited for a bit to get a photo. It didn't take long before I caught it on camera, once again I have not been able to identify it.



I would love an ID on this rodent if possible.

I went back out to the salt lick just before 8:00pm ready with flashes and torches. I sat in the dark for hours but nothing showed, it didn't help that the salt lick is very close to the road and the car noise must be very off putting for the animals. I turned in at 10:30pm, as I arrived back to the van I saw another **Black-eared Opossum** in the trees. The next morning we decided to leave the park for Iguazu and come back a couple of days later to try again for Tapir.



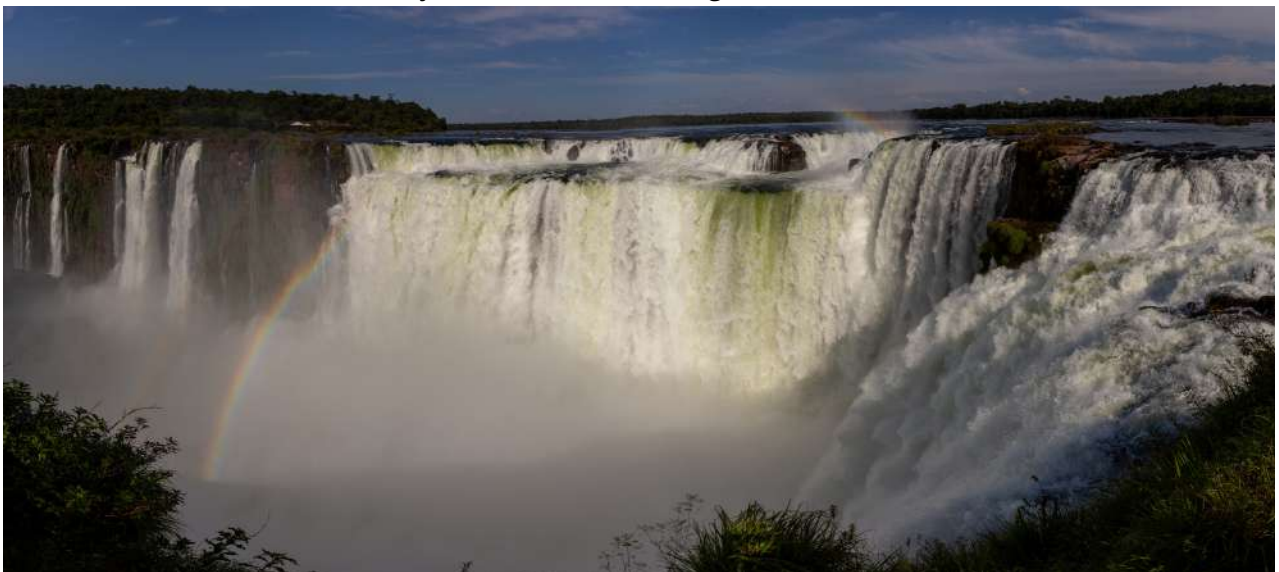
Black-eared Opossum with its fangs out.

27 - 28 Jan 2020 - Iguazu Falls

If you're in the region, you'd be pretty mad not to visit the falls. Although very busy, they are exceptional and for the entry price (800 pesos/person) I think it's great value. We walked all trails in one day (approx 16km), the only proper nature trail is Macuco trail which is 6km long. It was nice in the morning and we had good views of **Black Capuchin**. Around all the food areas, **South American Coatis** were very common (several people feeding them despite millions of signs saying not to), and **Capuchins** frequented too. We visited again the following day for the boat tour, and while driving back to the entrance one of the other guests saw an **Agouti** running across the road, but I missed it.



A juvenile Coati searching for crumbs.



The awe-inspiring falls

23 - 25 Jan 2020 - Urugua-i Provincial Park (again)

We went back to Urugua-i at night, hoping we may see some wildlife on the way. We left Puerto Iguazu at 9:00pm and headed south. Unfortunately, an immense rain storm came about and we could barely see the road, let alone any animals. We did have one encounter with a small-medium sized cat crossing the road in front of us, it appeared to be patterned but it was hard to tell given the conditions - most likely something interesting though!

The following day was the same as the previous night, rain. It eventually cleared and at 1:30pm I could finally get out of the van and to the salt lick (or mud wallow, as it had become). Once again, after a couple of hours, nothing had shown. It has proved to be a great place to get stuck into a book though (if you can deal with the mosquitos and bees).

Back at the car and a ranger came to visit, a different one from last time. I asked her about the Tapir and she had said that yes they are here and they can even be in the camp site or around the buildings, she also showed me a tunnel under the road which they use to cross from the salt lick to the camp. She didn't mention anything about the rain effecting them so I had higher hopes that evening.

I spent the night split between walking around and waiting at the salt lick, the only mammal I had seen was another **Black-eared Opossum**. By 10:15pm I was back at the car and pretty buggered but I decided to wait out the hour at the salt lick for a last chance at Tapir. At 10:30pm I was thoroughly rewarded as a **South American Tapir** (*Tapirus terrestris*) briefly appeared near the edge of the bushes. I had been sitting in the dark when I had heard some light movement in the bushes, as I turned my torch on, the light must have scared it off as it retreated to the forest. I sat in darkness waiting for it to return but unfortunately it did not. A success even if it took 4 nights!



An excellent sign showing the different foot prints of some common mammals.

This was our last provincial park in Misiones and we only stopped here as it was a good half way point to Ibera National Park. It a small park on the river border with Paraguay with some short walking trails to some look outs. The forest here is much drier than the previous parks but still boasts good biodiversity. Entry and camping is free.

We did one of the walks in the afternoon to a mirador. We spooked a medium size mammals in the dense forest and it ran down the hill, we didn't get a glimpse at it. I was pretty buggered from a longish drive and a late night before so I didn't go out spotlighting, but as we were heading to sleep I happen to look out the window to see a **Paraguayan Hairy Dwarf Porcupine** (*Sphiggurus spinosus*) walking through the camp! I scrambled to put on some clothes and grabbed the camera. We got outside just in time to get an average photo before it returned to the bushes.



The crazy looking Paraguayan Hairy Dwarf Porcupine, my first New World porcupine.

In the late morning there was an **Azara's Agouti** was hanging around the camp eating the the nuts fallen from the palm trees. As there seemed to be a bit of mammal action around, we decided to stay an extra night so we could do a bit of spotlighting. In the late afternoon I had a chat with the ranger who was gave us the unfortunate news that you aren't allowed on any of the trails or even the road after dark. I couldn't quite understand why but i think it had something to do with drug smugglers from Paraguay. This was the first provincial park in Misiones that didn't allow us on the trails at night. The next morning I did one of the trails, it was very quiet except for an **Azara's Agouti**. There was plenty of tracks, scats and diggings around, indicating there might be some interesting things around, but given you aren't allowed out at night I wouldn't recommend this park for mammal watching.

This large national park is quite attractive as it has a good list of reintroduced large mammals, including Maned Wolf, Giant Anteater, Jaguar and Tapir. However this park is also logistically difficult. There are several entrance and they are all hours away from each other on roads that cannot be passed if it has rained, especially if you don't have 4WD. If you are serious about mammal watching here, I highly recommend having a 4WD and probably a guide.

We arrived late afternoon to Colonia Carlos Pellegrini. This is the most accessible and most visited area of the park. We elected to camp in the camp ground (750 peso/night) which was pleasantly by one of the large lagunas. **Capybaras** were common around the camp. There are boat tours run from the campsite that go through the laguna but the only mammals you can see are Capybara and marsh deer so we decided against it (not sure the cost although i heard around 800 peso/person).

In the evening I went for a walk along the causeway but found nothing but **Capybaras** and Caymans. In the morning we were up early to head towards the visitors center. We had read that Howler Monkeys could be see around here. I thought I had read that they were on Sendero de Los Montes, so we started out on that trail at 7:00am. We found out pretty quick this was the wrong trail as there was almost zero habitat for monkeys. We did see an **Red Brocket** (*Mazama americana*) at the end of this trail. Instead the correct trail was Sendero Caraya, which was much shorter and on the opposite side of the road. We did two loops of the 600m trail but had no luck with the monkeys. It surprised me that they are even there, as it's a tiny patch of forest with not many large trees, however supposedly they are. **Red Brocket** deer was also common in the car park.



Red Brocket walking through the low shrubs on the Sendero de Los Montes

3 - 6 Feb 2020 - Ibera National Park (Cont.)

From Colonia Carlos Pellegrini we made the trip to the northern section of the park, and camped at the Monte Rey camp ground. This camp ground was much nicer and also free and empty. The drive in provided a **Marsh Deer** (*Blastocerus dichotomus*) and just before the camp ground two more **Marsh Deer**, these were seen here each day. The camp itself had several resident **Capybara** and the drive in was full of bird life.

Trails close at 7:30pm, so spotlighting isn't much of an option unfortunately. In the evening as we got into our tent (the van was too hot for sleeping) for the night and heard something outside in the near by shelter. I stuck my head out of the tent to see four **Crab-eating Foxes**, one of them was running off my partners shoes! I had to jump out of the tent in my undies and chase the fox into the bushes to get the shoes back, they were incredibly bold!



Female Marsh Deer in the marsh.

3 - 6 Feb 2020 - Ibera National Park (Cont.)

In the morning we were sitting having breakfast at our shelter and a **Crab-eating Fox** appeared out of the bushes carrying the rear hind quarter of a small **Capybara**! It jogged passed and then back into the bushes. That day was much the same as the last.

However in the evening I found a tiny **bat** close to the ground in one of the camp shelters. It didn't look like it was doing so good to I took it back to our shelter and tried to give it some water. Unfortunately it did not survive the night. I have not been able to identify it.



Dorsal and ventral views of the small bat.



A Capybara with a Tropical Kindbird for a hat.

6 - 7 Feb 2020 - Mburucuyá National Park

This park is quite close to Ibera, and hosts similar species, but there are semi regular sightings of Maned Wolf. I don't know if these sightings are by the public or by rangers/researchers, although I suspect the later. The park can be accessed from the north or south, both roads are pretty bad and can only be passed in the dry. Camping and entry are free. Once again trails close before dark so spotlighting is limited the camp ground and possibly driving on the road.

On our drive in from the south we saw **Marsh Deer** and **Capybara**. In late afternoon a **Pampas Fox** strolled through the camp, I followed it to take some shots and it made an awfully loud alarm call. By the time it was dark, there were 4 **Pampas Foxes** patrolling the camp, one with no tail. The Foxes, paired with 4 species of nocturnal bird, made the campsite quite alive at night.



One of the Pampas Foxes common in the camp.

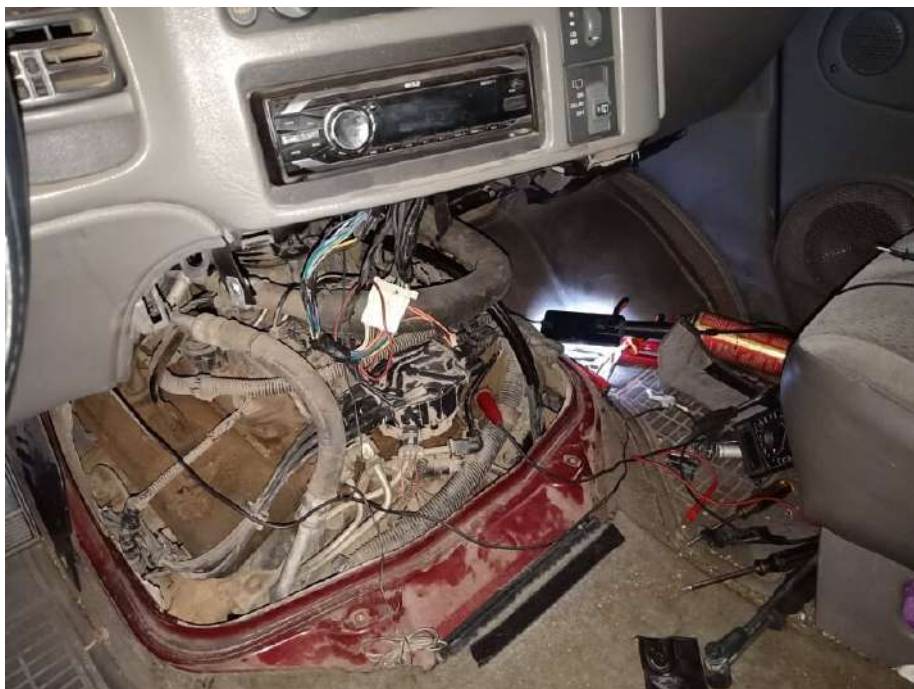
6 - 7 Feb 2020 - Mburucuyá National Park (Cont.)

In the morning we decided to do the Che Roha trail that visits a few lagunas and passes through a bit of forest. The trail had numerous armadillo diggings but I'm not sure which species. At around the 2km mark I saw a **Pampas Fox** on the trail, it quickly fled but it alerted us to the presence of a group of **Black-and-Gold Howler Monkeys** (*Alouatta caraya*). We watched the group of 8 for about 20 minutes, they were curious and watched back. Other than that the trail was very quite. Once back in camp we packed up and headed towards Corrientes.



The stunning primates enjoyed watching us as much as we enjoyed watching them!

While driving through the suburbs of Corrientes our van had a catastrophic break down. Luckily we were pushing distance a mechanic but due to a number of frustrating factors, our van would take 3 weeks to fix!



It's all fun and games until it's not! This model was never sold in Argentina so parts were as rare as hens teeth!

29 Feb - 1 March 2020 - Pampa del Indio

After three weeks of sitting idle in Corrientes, it felt great to once again get out into the bush. This park is quite small but has alright potential. It has a ~1.5km loop trail (with a 200m offshoot to an old broke bridge). Both the loop and the off shoot lead to Rio Negro, however when we visited it was bone dry, and looked like it hadn't had any water for a long time. On the trails there were plenty of tracks, and a few armadillo diggings.

At around 8pm we decided to spotlight the south boundary road of the park. The drive was pretty underwhelming, there were dozens of nightjars and a handful of Potoos. The only mammal was a **Tapeti** that my partner saw but I missed. Back at camp around 9:30pm and there was a **Pampas Fox** watching us eat dinner from the long grass.

After dinner I decided to do the loop trail again. It started off very slow but on the second half a few things popped up. First was another **Tapeti** that hopped down the trail, I was quite surprised to see them in such dry habitat. Second was a tiny **rodent** sitting in the middle of the trail. It had a very small body, large rear feet and a tail about 3 times longer than it's body. I have still not identified it. Lastly was a small arboreal mammal that only saw briefly, it was light on the underside and very fast, I would guess it was a marsupial, in which case I'm kicking myself I lost it. All in all a fine little park but nothing special, nice stop for one night.



Another rodent that's looking for an ID

1 - 2 March 2020 - El Impenetrable National Park

This park has a lot of promise, besides having one of the best names, it also boasts a huge variety of mammals including Jaguar, Tapir, Giant Anteater and Maned Wolf. This is Argentina's newest national park, and at time of our visit, only half the park was accessible. As a result, we were only permitted to camp just outside the gate in the carpark. When fully open, there will be campsite at the end of the road deep within the park, and this would be an ideal place to stay for a while. In the summer the park is open until 7:00pm and in the winter until 6:00pm. Roads are 4WD only after rain, even in the dry we struggled occasionally. Make sure to bring plenty of food, water and fuel if you visit this park, as it is very remote!

On the drive in my partner spotted a single **Chacoan Mara** (*Dolichotis salinicola*) resting under a cactus, I got reasonable views but it fled before getting any photos. Once inside the park we registered and had lunch. From what we gathered from the park ranger, anteater was possible and Tapirs were common, both in the day. These were our two targets so we found that promising. We decided to head into the park and scope it out. 20km of the park was open, this was mostly on sandy dusty roads lined with dense vegetation. Your only chance of seeing anything is if it crosses the road in front of you, however by the time you come to a stop you are in a cloud of dust. There are two lagunas towards the end of the road. One didn't have any obvious water but the first one did, so I decided to set up my hide and wait to see if anything would arrive. Unfortunately it was facing directly west, straight into the sun - and it was 35C. After 2 hours my time was up with nothing to show, the only visitors to the Laguna were ferals and domestics, cows, horses and a donkey. On the drive back a **Brown Brockets** crossed the road in front of us. A short spotlight outside the park didn't provide anything.

The next morning I found some Tapir foot prints just near the bridge, presumably from the night before. We also did the short sendero that is 1.5km from the entrance but found nothing. While we enjoyed this park a lot, we decided not to spend a second night as you are quite limited by what you can do from the entrance. We left and went west towards our next destination.

Around 7km from the park entrance, we found a **Giant Anteater** (*Myrmecophaga tridactyla*) on the side of the road. I skidded to a halt and jumped out of the car with my camera, following it into the bushes. It was difficult to get a clear shot but it was it was incredible to watch it move through the shrub!



Not an great photo but I had wanted to see one of these since I was a child, so no complaints here!

2 - 3 March 2020 - Fuerte Esperanza Provincial Park

Another park that is rarely visited, accessed off RP61. Once again free entry and camping, no facilities. There is a loop trail (Sendero el Puma) with 2 short cuts creating shorter loops. The longest loop seemed pretty overgrown so we stick to the middle loop, it was around 1.7km.

It was dead hot when we arrived so we siesta'd until around 5pm when we hit the trail. It was a pretty quite walk until towards the end we saw a **Chacoan Mara** on the trail, there were two more in the area between the camp ground and the trail entrance. These Mara are much more skittish than their Patagonian cousins, so getting close photos wasn't possible.



A distant Chacoan Mara

2 - 3 March 2020 - Fuerte Esperanza Provincial Park (Cont.)

There was no restrictions on walking after dark (in fact the guard left when we arrived and we didn't see him again), so once it was dark I did the middle loop again. I assume "El Puma" is just the name of the trail, and that there aren't pumas regularly seen there (although there is a sign that shows foot prints and puma features), but just in case, don't walk it alone at night like I did. The walk was very quiet and until around the end when I was a **Southern Three-banded Armadillo** (*Tolypeutes matacus*), it wasn't hanging around to get it's photo taken though. Back at the camp and a band of **Pampas Foxes** were on the prowl. Interestingly, one of them, a young one, was missing both eyes, it was sticking close to mum but it must be a tough life!

3 March 2020 - Copo National Park

We had originally intended to spend one or two nights here after reading Richard Webb's 2009 report, however on arrival we were met with locked gates and no one in sight. We waited around and had some lunch, but no one came. The road that was written about in the report was locked and we could find any trails. As the entry road was awful to drive, mostly through pastures, and it was 39C, we decided to keep moving west. A single **Chocaon Mara** was around the seemingly abandoned buildings.

6 - 7 March 2020 - Cerro Negro

After a few mammal-less days in the the lower-mid Andes on our way to Chile, we found ourselves wild camping near the settlement of Cerro Negro. As we drove around looking for a camp, a small mammal ran across the road that I missed but my partner saw. This looked like a good place to set up camp (-28.273833, -67.128214). It was already late so we had some dinner and wine before I went out looking for herps at nights. I wasn't really expecting any mammals, but I had a young and inquisitive **Pampas Fox** following me for the majority of the time. As I walked along the side of one of the trails I saw what I thought was Puma prints, this was enough to make me turn around and head back to the van (after scrutiny from the internet, they were found to be the prints of a large dog). In the morning I checkout out where my partner had seen the small mammal, it was a large **Southern Mountain Cavy** colony. The inhabitants were much more shy than the ones we had seen in the south.



A beautiful camp

8 - 13 March 2020 - Paso San Francisco

Our visa was running out, so we need to do a border run to Chile. Our chosen border crossing back into was the Paso San Francisco. This crossed the Andes at 4700m above sea level and the drive is absolutely stunning. We would also be doing this in reverse when coming back to Argentina, the whole process took about 6 days because of the altitude and available petrol station.

While heading up, at around 3000m, we saw our first herd of **Vicunas** (*Vicugna vicugna*). Our second camp on the way up was between the two border crossings (we had exited Argentina but hadn't entered Chile) at just above 4000m, had plenty **Vicunas** and a few **Guancos**. At the Chilean border post (135km away), a very healthy looking **Culpeo** was hanging around. The guards said his name was 'Pancho'. The drive back through the pass was much the same, with the same three mammals recorded.



Vicuna (top) and a Culpeo (bottom). Not a lot of other mammals at these altitudes.

16 March - 25 April 2020- Lockdown due to COVID19

As with everyone else in the world during this time, we were dealing with the global crisis of COVID19. For us this meant holding up in an AirBnb in the lovely city of Salta. Argentina had gone into lock down very quickly, while there was still less than 100 cases in entire country (population ~44 Million).

During our time here, the province of Salta had only 3 cases (all of which did recover). Because of this we had hoped that the province would reopen and we could at least explore Salta (we were still hoping to look for Southern Mountain Viscacha and Pampas Cat). But in mid April a repatriation flight was announced to bring Australians home.

We wrestled with the choice to stay or go. Both had pros and cons. The ownership of the Chilean van was the main problem, as we could not sell it in Argentina (and who would want to buy a camper van in the middle of a pandemic).

In the end we decided to store the van in Salta and return home. The future of the van is uncertain, we may be able to return and continue at least some of the trip (after all we had planned to go to Peru, Bolivia and Ecuador), but this will depend on our financial situation.

The decision to return home was the right one, as travel domestic travel in Argentina is not possible and there were no more flights to Australia in 2020.

A bitter sweat end to a fantastic time spent in this incredibly diverse country with some absolutely incredible animals. I can highly recommend it to anyone interested in mammals or birds.

Species List

Species listed in order they were first seen. Only mammals that were either identified and/or photographed are included on this list.

1. Guanacos (*Lama guanicoe*)
2. South American Grey Foxes (*Lycalopex griseus*)
3. European Hares (*Lepus europaeus*)
4. Patagonia Hog-nosed Skunk (*Conepatus humboldtii*)
5. Culpeo (*Lycalopex culpaeus*)
6. Big Hairy Armadillo (*Chaetophractus villosus*)
7. Peale's Dolphin (*Lagenorhynchus australis*)
8. American Beaver (*Castor canadensis*)
9. Muskrat (*Ondatra zibethicus*)
10. South American Sea Lion (*Otaria flavescens*)
11. Commerson's Dolphin (*Cephalorhynchus commersonii*)
12. Bunny Rat (*Reithrodon auritus*)
13. Puma (*Puma concolor*)
14. Patagonian Mara (*Dolichotis patagonum*)
15. Southern Mountain Cavy (*Microcavia australis*)
16. Pichi (*Zaedyus pichiy*)
17. Southern Elephant Seal (*Mirounga leonina*)
18. Burmeister's Porpoise (*Phocoena spinipinnis*)
19. Lesser Grison (*Galictis cuja*)
20. Orca (*Orcinus orca*)
21. Capybara (*Hydrochoerus hydrochaeris*)
22. Chital (*Axis axis*)
23. Coypu (*Myocastor coypus*)
24. Pampas Fox (*Lycalopex gymnocercus*)
25. Crab-eating Foxes (*Cerdocyon thous*)
26. Plains Viscacha (*Lagostomus maximus*)
27. Wild Boar (*Sus scrofa*)
28. Six Banded Armadillo (*Euphractus sexcinctus*)
29. Brown (Gray) Brocket (*Mazama gouazoubira*)
30. Nine Banded Armadillo (*Dasypus novemcinctus*)
31. Geoffroy's Cat (*Leopardus geoffroyi*)
32. Brazilian Cavy (*Cavia aperea*)
33. South American Coati (*Nasua nasua*)
34. Collared Pecary (*Pecari tajacu*)
35. Azara's Agouti (*Dasyprocta azarae*)
36. Brown-eared Woolly Opossum (*Caluromys lanatus*)
37. Tapeti (*Sylvilagus brasiliensis*)
38. Atlantic Bamboo Rat (*Kannabateomys amblyonyx*)
39. Rodent sp. (Cruce Caballero Provincial Park)
40. Big-eared Opossum (*Didelphis aurita*)
41. Rodent sp. (Pinalito Provincial Park)
42. Black Capuchin (*Sapajus nigritus*)
43. Rodent sp. (Urugua-i Ecological Park)
44. South American Tapir (*Tapirus terrestris*)
45. Paraguayan Hairy Dwarf Porcupine (*Sphiggurus spinosus*)
46. Red Brocket (*Mazama americana*)
47. Marsh Deer (*Blastocerus dichotomus*)
48. Bat sp. (Ibera National Park)
49. Black-and-Gold Howler Monkeys (*Alouatta caraya*)
50. Rodent sp. (Pampa del Indio)
51. Chacoan Mara (*Dolichotis salinicola*)
52. Giant Anteater (*Myrmecophaga tridactyla*)
53. Southern Three-banded Armadillo (*Tolypeutes matacus*)
54. Vicunas (*Vicugna vicugna*)