



# MAMMAL REPORT

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CHILE: CENTRAL & SOUTH (PLUS SOUTHERN ARGENTINA)  
13 OCT - 18 DEC 2019

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

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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 of money.

This trip report will be one of a series from each country visited. The trip was not solely designed around seeing mammals, but as a wildlife photographer, we were bound to run into a few.

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

The report is written with the intention to help solo mammal watchers without guides.

Big thanks to all previous trip reports. Only sites where mammals were encountered will be mentioned. All efforts were made to 'wild camp' during the trip, so no accommodation recommendations are made.



Approximate route taken as we went south from Santiago.

15 - 17 OCT 2019 - EL YESO

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To test out our newly bought van we decided to drive up to El Yeso Dam (Emblase El Yeso), as this was quite close to Santiago and a pretty easy drive. Unfortunately for us the road was closed just before the dam (-33.674539, -70.083962), according to locals, some tourists had fallen to their deaths a few months ago so the road was indefinitely closed. We did a 17km walk along the road passed the damn but saw no mammals, snow flurries encouraged us to turn around. On our last morning we saw our first mammal for the trip, a lone **Culpeo** (*Lycalopex culpaeus*) at the waterfall near the road closure.



Culpoes standing above the side of the road. I would also like to note that, much like Jon Hall's report mentioned, this species is quite hard to tell apart from South American Grey Fox.

19 - 21 OCT 2019 - NEAR PARQUE NACIONAL TOLHUACA

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After spending a few nights on Chile's central coast, we continued south and stopped for 2 nights at a small river side camp along the Rio Malleco (-38.190171, -71.945405). This was a free and quiet camp, and our first time in any forest. I was keen to see what was around at night, so I followed the short, and quite overgrown, path out of the camp to the South East. I didn't get very far before seeing my first mammal, a **Monito del Monte** (*Dromiciops gliroides*).

These little guys proved quite common, with 6 individuals seen on the short walk. However they have a knack for always being behind at least one stick, it wasn't until the 5th and 6th individual that I managed to get a clear photo. The second night I endeavoured to get better photos by putting out some peanut butter, unfortunately my time was wasted and after two hours in the cold I called it quits, two **Monito del Monte** were seen while walking around the camp though. At least 2 species of bats were flying around the river at dusk.



The incredible Monito del Monte reminded me very much of the pygmy possums of Australia.

## 21 - 22 OCT 2019 - VILLARRICA VOLCANO

One night spent on this beautiful volcano just below the tree line. An afternoon walk produced a lone **European Hare** (*Lepus europaeus*), while a short night walk (sub zero) produced two more **Monito del Monte**.





Villarrica Volcano is well worth the visit - it even glows at night!

## 23 - 25 OCT 2019 - PUYEHUE NATIONAL PARK

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Camping on the side of the road that leads to Argentina, a night walk up the road produced a suspected **Culpeo** and two small arboreal mammals, with similar behavior to the **Monte del Monito** (which is what they were assumed to be). In camp, small rodents were feeding on our food scraps as a Rufous-legged Owl watched over. Everything except the owl avoided the camera. The second night was a complete wash out with rain, but once again I saw the glowing eyeshine of a few arboreal mammals.

## 25 OCT 2019 - OSORNO VOLCANO

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We had heard that this location was great to photograph some tame South American Gray Foxes, however the weather was absolutely horrendous, rain, sleet, fog and strong winds. Alas we saw nothing, not even the top of the volcano.

## 26 OCT - 1 NOV 2019 - CHILOE ISLAND

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While crossing on the ferry I kept a look out for any dolphins, but saw none. I did see 6 **South American Sea Lions** (*Otaria flavescens*), one in the middle of the channel and 5 sleeping on bouys close to Chacao.

Our first stop on the island was Puñihuil, a small town in the NW of the island (mentioned in several previous trip reports). We wanted to see the penguins but also were hopeful about Marine Otter, after asking our friendly tour guide, our hopes were dashed. According to him, they hadn't been seen in the bay for ~5 years. Still, the tour was great and in my mind totally worth the \$7000 CLP per person. We had close views of **South American Sea Lions** and the boat got visited by a small pod of the smallest dolphins I had ever seen, they appeared to have a light grey body color and a dark dorsal fin. I was quite sure they were **Chilean Dolphin** (*Cephalorhynchus eutropia*), but I understand **Peale's Dolphin** (*Lagenorhynchus australis*) is seen there more frequently, so I cannot say for certain. The birds were also fantastic on this tour.



A female South American Sea Lion on one of the small islands.

## 26TH OCT - 1 NOV 2019 - CHILOE ISLAND (CONT.)

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On a terribly wet Monday, we made our way south to Castro. A couple of kilometers south of Degañ, we struck gold, as we saw our first **Southern Pudu** (*Pudu puda*) on the side of the road in the gutter (-42.17509, -73.718594). We stopped as quickly as we could and I dived into the back van get a rain jacket and camera. By the time I made it up onto the road, the Pudu had gone and I was left soaking wet. A couple of kilometers later we saw another, but we unable to stop. We decide to head off the highway onto a side road to look for more Pudu, after about 1.5 hours of searching we came up empty handed, and continued onto our camp site.

A couple days later we headed towards Parque Tepeuico in search of more Pudu and hopefully Darwin's Fox. We couldn't afford to stay within the privately owned reserve but had planned to spotlight the entrance road. We parked at a small pull off 150m before the office entrance (-42.738806, -73.96102) in the afternoon. Not long after arriving, there was a female **Southern Pudu** just behind our van eating some vegetation. It allowed us to get some nice shots before disappearing into the forest - a good start. We waited the many hours for it to get dark and then started driving out. Unfortunately we saw no animals on the drive out, and to make matters worse, the camp we had chosen for the night was full, so we had to drive a further 50km south to the next camp. No native animals were seen on this drive either.



A female Southern Pudu.



## 26TH OCT - 1 NOV 2019 - CHILOE ISLAND (CONT.)

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For a last ditch effort at Darwin's Fox, we decided to go to Tantauco National Park. We continued south and then into the interior where the roads degraded. Upon arriving at the entrance to the park, we were elated to see a **Darwin's Fox** (*Lycalopex fulvipes*) just sitting by guards office (-43.016318, -73.78191). It was raining but we were still able to take some very nice photos. Evidently, this friendly fox was quite habituated, even coming up to sniff my partner. We asked the park guard if it was a pet and he assured us it wasn't, just an 'amigo', but I have no doubt they feed it every now and then. It did eventually slink off into the forest but we were very pleased with the views. While we had planned to camp within the park (\$15,000 CLP` /night) it wasn't taking guests at the time due to the on going protests that were happening across Chile (at one point a few days prior we had to drastically change plans as a large fire lit by protesters had blocked the only road into Castro). As much as we would have enjoyed seeing the forest within the park, we had seen our target species and decided turn around and head back north. On the drive out we saw another two **Southern Pudu**.



The beautiful (and surprisingly small) Darwin's Fox, critically endangered.

We had made two attempts to do a boat tour on the Chepu River to see Southern River Otter. However on both days non-stop rain prevented us from going out. Something to come back for.



## 1 - 5 NOV 2019 - PETROHUÉ

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Our first stop back on the mainland was Petrohué, north east of Puerto Montt. As we arrived at the car park near the round about, a **South American Gray Fox** (*Lycalopex griseus*) stood miserably in the pouring rain. Some not so great pictures were taken before we headed down hill 3.5km to our campsite at La Máquina Mirador, overlooking the Rio Petrohué. In the evening I decided to go spotlighting in the light rain. I walked down the road and it was less than 500m before I saw my first eyeshine. It was in a tree about two meters above the ground, I knew it wasn't a Monito del Monte (the only other nocturnal arboreal mammal I had seen in Chile) because the eyes were too far apart. Before getting any closer I decided to fire off a shot to see what it was. To my surprise on the back of my camera was an out of focus photo of a **Kodkod** (*Leopardus guigna*)! I immediately tried to take another photo but the cat had already dropped down into the incredibly dense vegetation below. A brief but very exciting encounter!



Unfortunately, this Kodkod photo isn't getting any clearer. But as far as I know there is nothing else this could be identified as, given the location.

I continued down the road until the rain became a little too heavy, then turned around. Once back at camp, the rain had stopped, so I decided to walk the road in the other direction. Not long before I saw a **Monito del Monte** in the shrubs, then another, then another. I stopped counting at 6 and turned around and went back to camp for the night.



Monito del Monte in a nearly unobstructed position.

The following night was dry and cold. I went down the road again this, time all the way to the waterfall. On the 5km return walk I saw another 6 **Monito del Monte** and a lone **South American Gray Fox**.

On the Sunday we visited Saltos de Petrohué, the cascades just down river from our camp. It was a steep \$6,000 CLP/person to get in, but was a nice area (although we couldn't locate our target species, Torrent Duck). There were 3 tame **South American Gray Foxes** around the ticket office.



A South American Gray Fox curled up near the ticket office.



## 10 NOV 2019 - QUELUAT NATIONAL PARK

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While recovering from a bout of food poisoning, we visited the stunning Quelat National Park, home of the hanging glacier. This is another private national park and the entry fee was \$8,000 CLP/gringo. The glacier is stunning, with two waterfalls shooting out of the bottom. The 6km return hike was easy - moderate, and would have been a lot easier if we weren't sick. While having a snack at the glacier viewpoint, a small greyish rodent appeared and started eating our crumbs. A few more crumbs enticed it pause for a photo, albeit briefly. It was later identified to be likely a member of the **Abrothrix** genus (happy for anyone to comment on further ID). In my opinion this is a park that shouldn't be missed, even if it doesn't have highlight mammals. Black-throated Huet Huet and Chacao Tapaculo were also very common and much tamer than other locations we had visited.



Abrothrix sp. nibbling on our cracker crumbs



Qualuat Hanging Glacier

## 13 - 15 NOV 2019 - PATAGONIA NATIONAL PARK

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Our last stop on the Carretera Austral was the absolutely stunning Patagonia National Park. Before we had even arrived in the park, we had seen our first herd of **Guanacos** (*Lama guanicoe*), 7 of them on the road. As these were our first, we pulled over to get some photos. Once in the park (\$8000 CLP/person entry fee) we saw hundreds. They were very common, the largest herd was around 90 individuals. I had high-ish hopes for Puma within the park, we searched as much as we could, but we were with friends and didn't put in huge amounts of time. A ranger we had spoken to said that one had passed through visitors center area only 3 days before we had arrived. We couldn't stay in this area at the time due to the campsite being closed, but spent two afternoons there looking. **European Hare** was also common within the park. I think there is a real chance for Puma here if one puts in the time. From here we continued west and crossed the border into Argentina.



Many Guanacos through out the park. Several European Hares chasing each other



## 15 NOV 2019 - RUTA 40, BETWEEN BAJO CARACOLES AND GOBERNADOR GREGORES (ARGENTINA)

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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** and two **South American Grey Foxes**. 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**.

## 16 - 21 NOV 2019 LOS GLACIER NATIONAL PARK (ARGENTINA)

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Our first visit within the national park was to the adventure town of El Chalten. 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 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 our second destination within 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 expected and its 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 its tail in the wind.

## 16 - 21 NOV 2019 LOS GLACIER NATIONAL PARK (ARGENTINA)(CONT.)

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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** hanging around the car park.



A sly Culpeo 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 still had great fun watching him. From here we headed towards the Chilean border with lots of **Guancos** and **Hares** on the way.



The aw-inspiring Perito Moreno Glacier



## 22 - 27 NOV 2019 - TORRES DEL PAINE NATIONAL PARK

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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 CLP/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, 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 it can be identified.



Deceased rodent - feel free to ID

## 22 - 27 NOV 2019 - TORRES DEL PAINE NATIONAL PARK (CONT.)

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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** (*Conepatus humboldtii*) wandering around in the grasslands. It was quite a way from the road and we had taken 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 on fuel and food. Upon returning to the park the following evening, 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 that 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.)

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Although we were unsuccessful with our hunt for the puma, 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

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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 TO PORVENIR FERRY

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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 Porvier (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. After 15 mins our first cetaceans, **Peale's dolphin** (*Lagenorhynchus australis*), finally some picture proof! The middle of the journey was not very productive, even for birds. As we arrived into Porvier, another group of **Peales Dolphins** briefly joined the boats 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

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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.

Once again we were burdened with sickness, this time the flu, so unfortunately 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.

## 13 - 15 DEC 2019 - TEIRRA DEL FUEGO NATIONAL PARK (ARGENTINA)

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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 checked out 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 through 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 within the park were some small rodents on the Senda Costera trail. They were chocolate brown, with small ears and short tails, but I couldn't get any photos.



## 18 DEC 2019 - BAHIA AZUL TO PUNTA DELGADA FERRY

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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 now we needed to pass through Chile to once again enter Argentina and start our journey north. Anyway, back to the ferry. We boarded 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 and look forward to tackling the north in mid - late 2020.



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

Thank you to anyone who is still reading, I know this is a long report but hopefully it provides some good information to those planning a trip, especially unguided, to this part of the world.