

Trip report Chile

'Another cat quest ending in 'just' pumas

19 june – 16 july 2019



Dear reader,

Chile was the next country to focus on finding new cat species for my world cat quest. We focussed on *Andean cat*, *Pampas cat* and *Kodkod* and would go for *Puma* as a bonus.

After our succesfull trip for *Sand cat* january this year *Lennart Verheuvell* and I agreed to do another bigger tour together. Photography is both our passion and we try as best to make good pictures of any mammal and most birds during the trip. I hope you'll enjoy this report although it will this time not 'help as much for the samller cats' 😊 Feel free to commend or ask questions! After this part of Chile I also made a short tour in Bolivia over which I will report seperately.

At last always thanks again to www.mammelwatching.com for presenting such worth full trip reports. It was of great use and guidance.

Best regards,

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General information

Preparation

International Flights Amsterdam - Santiago and 4 internal flights by LATAM and SKY. All on time and no problems with (hand) luggage!

For all places visited we booked rental cars via www.sunnycars.com. This is a very handy intermediate company that has deals without any hidden stuff and all assurances are paid of. We were quit satisfied about this. All cars were picked-up from 'Europcar desk' at the airports.

Money

ATM's are everywhere. Shops are just like in Europe. Prices of food and overnight are quit good.

Safety

We felt all the time safe and had no problems beside our 'arrestment in the altiplano': While we were spotliting at 11.00 in the evening near Salar de Surire we were stopped over by 'heavily armed carabinieri'. This was a pretty scary moment but luckily as soon as the policeman concluded we were just some 'cazy spotliting wildlife tourists' it was all okay. We later on had another stop-over but not as scary as the first one.

Note: It is recomandable to tell at CONAF stations that you are in the area, that might help. The employes of Conaf were very friendly an helpful in finding us good places for the cats. Also they had no problems with us spotliting. The area of Lauca and La Surire is known for smuggling routes to Bolivia and this is why police are heavily armed and a bit whary...

We never felt unsafe in Chile, people are friendly and helpful!

Comments on the itinerary

Torres del Paine & terra de fuego (7 days)

Our main goal was puma here. There has been written a lot about the pumas of Torres del Paine. You can easily do a self drive and find the cats yourself if a bit lucky and if you have time.

We got our rental SUV from Punta Arenas Airport and drove to Porto Natales to a hostel. From here we drove daily to the park which is around 1 hour and a half if you take your time. We camped one night at lake Pahoehoe campsite but preferred the warm hostel the next days. Since it was winter there was only daylight from 9 - 5.30 so there was enough time for the transfers in dark.

If you want you can pay a *sh#tload* of money and go search for the pumas just outside the park in the 'estancia area'. Other tourists told they paid a *1000 dollars* a day!! The positive thing of that is you more or less are guaranteed to see pumas and probably can get very close, the bad thing is that it is *extremely* expensive.

We decided to check just inside the park ourselves and were quit happy we did so! We had 3 amazing encounters with puma(s) 'for free'!! We can say we made a good choice 😊 We have to admit we did also see 2 pumas together and 3 pumas together in the 'estancia area' from the main road. So this area is definitely good to scan around too! Both sightings were a bit distant but still good. Remember the owner of the estancia is 'patrolling' this road to check if people don't go offroad, we heard they are rather strict so better try not.

Our first **puma** was just 5 minutes after we started a first walk on the only track next to south entrance 'the portería' that is allowed in the 'puma area near Lago Sarmiento'. We bumped into it while we were eating our lunch 😊. Another day one puma crossed the road in the same area a bit more into the park. On the final day we had an amazing sighting of three almost adult cubs only 10 meters from the road! This was a fantastic experience. This sighting was just on the north side of where the two different entrance roads come together in the park (more or less 'the end of the puma area'). As we were told pumas seem to cross between the park border and the estancia area so it also depends on where they hangout if you're lucky or not.

Further we had a short visit to tierra de fuego and from the ferry we saw one **whale** and two types of **dolphins** and **2 sea lions**.

Info about other mammals is written in the triplist.

Island of Chiloe (Tantauco NP & Tephueico NP) (4 days)

This Island is good to visit on your own by rental car, although a 4*4 would be a far better choice in Tantauco NP. Next time I would take a 4*4 if you want to drive this park road (it is very long and we did not dare to drive the whole because it was too risky in our small car. We overnighted in two hostals one in Ancud and one in Castro. Tephueico is now easily visited on foot by a small bridge. I missed *kodkod* on a split second but Lennart saw it running from the forest road in front of us in mid day! I was looking to the ground for fresh tracks of kodkod which we saw on our way back to the bridge 😞. 'This was 'THE cat-fail of my life'!

I guess it is still a hard job to find them, a bit like marbled cat in Borneo? However we did see **Darwin's fox** quite easily in Tantauco during night drive and on a walking track also a few **pudu** from the main road on the way to Tantauco.

Northern Chile High Andes Lauca National Park (13 days)

Here we had a long stay at the 'altplano'. I would recommend to take a 4*4 instead of a common small car like we had first. We picked up our car from Arica airport and had some shopping in Arica before heading to Putre. We also bought four 20 liter fuel tanks at the COPEC gas station. We overnighted in the pleasant and cheap hostel 'Pachamama' in Putre. From here we had our first drives to Lauca. After two nights we continued to Guallatire and overnighted in the local hostel (Hospedaje Guallatire). From here we had a lot of (night)drives and walks at 'vizcachas colonies'. Conclusion in the end we missed all cats over around 9 nights of searching! This area is a real 'hard to get cats place'. We saw only a few **andean foxes** and one lesser **grison** (lucky shot) besides plenty of **vizcachas** and **vicuñas**. This quest is a tough one! I am still very jealous at the ones who were successful here before, it hurts a bit 😞. We got a nice view of the 'famous' **marine otter** at the coastal cliffs of Arica and **sea lions** in the harbour.

Trip itinerary & Places visited



TRIPLIST MAMMALS IN RANDOM ORDER

Pudu (Pudu pudu) -- one and two animals seen from the road driving to Tentauco, 1 spotlighting in Tentauco.

Mountain Viscacha - locally abundant in Lauca, Las Vicunas and salar de Surire in Rocky areas. Next to both CO-NAF stations is a colony.

Culpeo / Andean fox – probably two seen on the road next to Lake Pahoe in TDP. Some 10 spotlighting in Lauca (in the Lauca park part itself).

South American Sea-lion – two seen from ferry punta Delgada. One seen from ferry to Chiloe. Abundant in and around the fishing harbour of Arica.

Marine Otter - a single animal seen at Cuevas De Anzota on the artificial rocky place at the entrance. Twice coming from the water and carrying a crab to a den in the rocks.

Peale's dolphin– one seen from ferry Punta Arenas to Porvenir dark blackish and some grey parts.

Vicuna – quit common at higher elevations of the Andes, as soon as you reach the 'altiplano' area they are around here and there.

Taruca – a single male twice around 11.30 in the morning just above Putre on the small road. A group at night on the same road (some 10 animals). A male and female on the last morning also in the same area.

Puma – Ten animals: first Hermanieta just 200 meters on the track to lago Sarmiento. Second male 'Milan' a bit more in the park. two in the Estancia part from distant on some higher rocky slopes. Three along the shoreline on the rocks next to lago Sarmiento. Final three subadult young pumas two sisters and slightly bigger brother close tot the 'northern entrance' road in the park.

Guanaco - Common in the Sarmiento area in TDP. Especially common on Isla Grande tierra de fuego.

Chilla – Two in TDP from the walk track between the entrances of TDP. Five at the ferry waiting place at punta Delgada (close to the beach). One crossing the road on the way to Valparaiso from La Serena.

Darwin's fox - one animal at night on the road near the entrance of Parque Tepuhueico. Lennart saw a clear one in the forest on foot, I missed it but saw a possible second animal running in the bush the other way (not sure though)

Humboldt's Hog-nosed Skunk – Two seen spotlighting in the roadside on the way from TDP

European Hare – Common from the road at night from Punta Arenas – porto Natales. A few in TDP.

Commerson's Dolphin – two seen briefly from the Punta Delgada ferry crossing from Isla Grande

Unidentified whale sp. – a single animal from the ferry from punta Delgada. It was very dark with a very short back fin, probably a *southern right whale*.

Mouse unidentified -- One near Porterio Sarmiento, Torres del Paine

Mouse unidentified - Chiloe crossing the road

Mouse unidentified - one crossing road in Lauca during spotlighting.

Lesser grison – 1 seen at night in 'Las Vicunas' area spotlighting.

Some bat - a few seen flying at night outside of Arica



Puma 'Milan' with the Torres mountains in the back. (Turned to have a bigger view)



'Hermanieta' just after 5 minutes in Torres del Paine



**'Milan' the second great sighting of a puma in Torres del Paine
Photo just taken after it crossed the road**



Two pumas just outside TDP in the 'estancia area' seen from the main road. If you pay a lot of money you can get far more close on foot, but we were lucky in the park ourselves.



A mother puma and two cubs seen on the shore rocks of lago Sarmiento, a bit more east from main road in the 'estancia area'.



‘Two sisters and a brother’ just close to the road in TDP, how lucky!! 😊



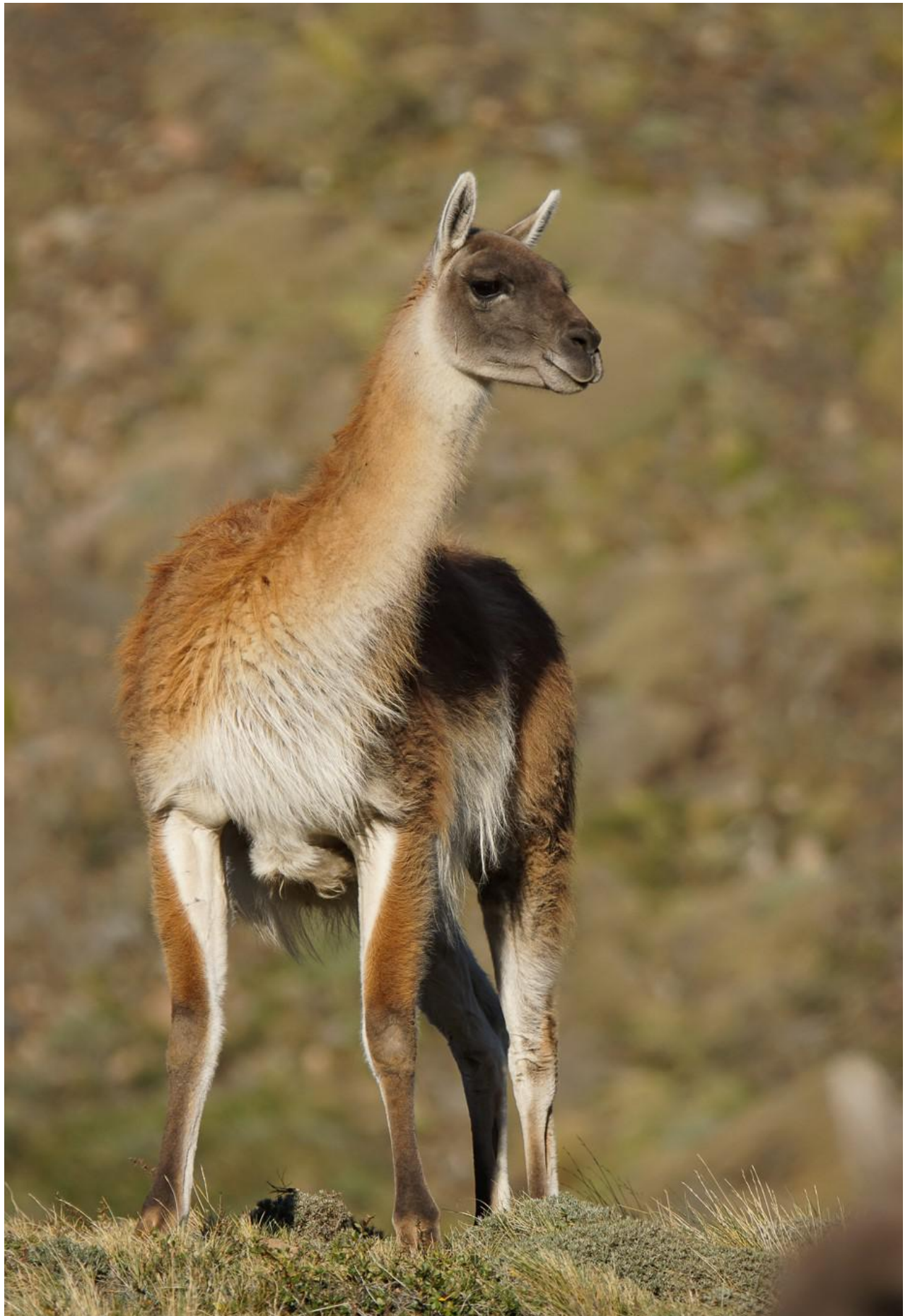
‘one of the sisters’ walking by



A goodbye look from the young male



Hare in TDP



Guanaco TDP



Chilla fox (grey fox) in TDP



Herd of guanacos in TDP



Probably a sea lion, close to the shore of Terra de fuego' at the beach before the small ferry crossing delgada



Darwin's fox in Tantauco (photo through car window)



Pudu on the way to Tentauco



Marine otter with a fresh crab catch



Bringing the catch to the den in the rocks



Sea lion in the harbour of Arica



Vicunas in Salar the Surire



Vizcacha in Salar de Surire



Male taruca just above Putre



The male with his 'wife' just above Putre



Andean Fox in Lauca



Taruca during spotlighting above Putre



The solar eclips in 'La Serena' was another good experience, highly recommendable!