

After reading several appealing reports on Jon's website, my wife and I really wanted to visit Chile, especially to try the several cat species leaving there and puma in particular in Torres del Paine. The problem was that we could only travel to Chile for a long trip in July-August, which meant visiting the country during wintertime with short days limiting time for wildlife watching. Also, it looked like seeing mammals in this country was not so easy and this statement proved to be correct when we came back from our trip. After reading carefully all the reports posted on the Mammal Watching website and contacting Marc Faucher, Lennart Verheuvell and Janco van Gelderen for their advice and suggestions based on their own experience (I would like to thank them all here), we came up with a nice 3-week long itinerary to visit Chile from North to South in August 2022. We basically spent one week in Putre / Altiplano, 1 week in Chiloé Island and 1 week in Patagonia / Torres del Paine.

We really enjoyed Chile globally speaking: it is a great country, easy to visit, with some amazing and scenic landscapes especially in the Altiplano and Patagonia. The cone shaped volcanoes with the high-altitude lakes are simply gorgeous. Torres del Paine and Tierra del Fuego are wonderful places to roam around by car or on foot. Chilean people are very friendly, easy to communicate with and I found with a good sense of humor. We visited Chile in winter so we knew would have pretty cold temperatures, and indeed early mornings in the Altiplano and Tierra del Fuego were freezing cold (down to -10°C) but we were lucky to have mostly sunny days throughout the trip, even on Chiloé Island, and we also had very little to no wind in Patagonia and Torres del Paine, which was clearly a plus. During 20 days spent in Chile, we only had 2 days of rain in Chiloé/Punta Arenas so there is nothing to complain about 😊. The accommodations we booked were generally very nice and comfortable, serving good food, but I must admit I found Chile to be quite expensive. The COVID rules to enter Chile were not too complicated. We came prepared with all the necessary documents to have a digital mobility pass before entering the country, which proved to be very useful as it allowed us to take all domestic flights, eat in restaurants or enter other public places by showing such a pass otherwise PCR tests would have been needed. I was surprised to see how strict the COVID rules were still in place in Chile in August and the fact that the vast majority of people were wearing a mask everywhere, not only in planes or busy public places but even in the most remote villages or while walking in nature.

A few words about wildlife watching now. Overall, I had mixed feeling after coming back from Chile. I generally found very hard to spot some specific mammal species during our trip although it was depending on the places we visited. I don't think it was due to the wintertime / cold weather to be honest, maybe we had some bad luck but I'm actually wondering if conditions to see some mammals are getting tougher nowadays in Chile (I will come back to this point later in my report). We knew we would not see as many species as what we could get in Africa or some places in Asia but still, seeing only 21 species over 20 days was a bit frustrating... Because we knew it would not be easy to spot some species and to maximize our chances, we booked some local guides which significantly increased the trip cost. I don't mind paying extra money if it's worth it but although our guides were very friendly and knowledgeable about the areas visited, I think they were all actually better for birding than mammal watching. They knew beforehand which mammal species we wanted to observe, and they strived to answer our expectations but, on a few examples, I think they could have done better. Anyway, since we enjoy observing both mammals and birds, I do not regret to have booked these guides.

Arica and the Altiplano:

We started our trip in this area. Right after the endless international flight from Paris to Santiago del Chile (14 hours!), we directly jumped in a plane to Arica (another 3 hours). We arrived exhausted but safely and on time in Arica where our guide was waiting for us to drop us at our very nice hotel: Hotel Apacheta located along the shore. I really enjoyed this hotel serving probably the best food we've had during the entire trip. We had enough time to visit the Cuevas the Anzota area known for **marine otters** from previous reports. After waiting for about 30min, we indeed had nice views of this cute animal. The cave and parking lot nearby were closed due to some rock falling problems apparently and as such, we could not look for bats there. From our observation point for the marine otters, we could see several **south American sea lions** playing in the ocean but also sadly several dead bodies on the rocky beaches... After a not so good resting night due to the jetlag, we left Arica for Putre on the following morning. The road climbing from sea level up to more than 4000m altitude is amazing!: gorgeous landscapes and we were lucky to see three **guanacos** about 50m from the road near the Zapahuira village. After dropping our bags in our hotel in Putre (Terrace Lodge), a basic but nice place with comfortable and warm rooms and a friendly owner, we continued driving to climb up to the Altiplano. What a magic landscape! On the first day we already saw a few **tarucas** and many **vicuñas**. We came back to the hotel in the evening very happy about our first sightings but with a strong headache due to the altitude. I believe we were too optimistic to go so high in altitude on the first day considering the jetlag and fatigue due to the international flight. After drinking many mate de coca, taking some paracetamol and having a real resting night, the headache was gone on the second morning and we handled well with altitude through the rest of our trip to the Altiplano. From our base in Putre, we visited during 5 full days several places: the Socoroma and Parinacota villages, the area around Lago Chungara with the splendid cone volcanoes behind, another area around the Taapacà volcano where we broke our record of being higher than 5000m in altitude! and the long and scenic A-235 roads up to the Salar de Surire. We spent these days

between birding and scanning for mammals with the secret hope to see Andean cats. Our guide knew about this and brought us to several places known for the Andean cats but despite many long hours spent on the field we saw none. We did not put too much effort to see them however to be honest since we didn't do any very long spotlighting sessions at night and spent daytime between birding and mammal watching. We read and our guide also told us that seeing Andean cats is not necessarily better at night than during the day. In addition, we had a car breakage that limited our time on the field and chances to spot Andean cats as we lost a full day to repair it. So no cat observed during our days at the Altiplano but we saw countless numbers of **mountain viscachas** and **vicuñas** as well as a colony of cute **Bolivian big-eared mice** near road CH-11. We also observed several **tarucas** at the usual place near Putre but also in Socoroma, and we saw one **culpeo** very well on an early morning close to Parinacota. The day when the car was broken was not totally lost as we could do long birding sessions around Putre, which allowed us to see a **white-bellied grass mouse** while looking for mountain doves. Although we had that car problem and did not see any cat, we really enjoyed this first week in the Arica-Putre-Altiplano area for several reasons: the weather was great, the landscape was amazing and I was pleasantly surprised to see so much wildlife there as I thought it would be very desertic but no, there is plenty of water and grass everywhere. As a result, we saw a large number of bird species and a decent wealth of mammal species. We basically saw everything we wanted to see there except the cats and Burmeister's porpoise.

Chiloé Island:

After a full day "lost" in the 2 planes bringing us from Arica to Puerto Montt through Santiago, we arrived at our hotel in Puerto Varas too late in the afternoon to enjoy the beautiful lake and scenic view on the volcanoes from our hotel room. We stayed at the very comfortable Hotel Bellavista for the night. We woke up early in the morning to be able to observe and take a few photos of the volcanoes behind the lake as soon as the sun rose and before taking our car for the drive to Chiloé Island where we would spend 5 full days in search of several local mammals like southern river otters, Chilean dolphins, pudus and of course Darwin's foxes and Kodkod. We had lots of expectation, may be too much, as our stay in Chiloé ended up being a major disappointment of our trip to Chile. The weather was not at stake I think since we had mostly sunny days but very cold temperature during our stay on the island. We took the ferry to Chacao and took advantage of this short ferry crossing for some mammal watching but except for many shore birds and a couple of **South American sea lions** we did not see anything else. Once we landed on the island, we continued our drive at low pace through several small ponds and lakes for some bird watching in the Ancud area and then, we drove straight to the Chepu river for an afternoon boat ride we booked there. On the W-250 road towards the Chepu river we came across a cute **pudu** not far from the road. It was a nice observation giving us plenty of good photo opportunities and it appeared later that it would be our best pudu observation during our stay on the island. When we reached the small pier on the river, we jumped on the boat we found out would be just for ourselves. The captain was very friendly and good to spot wildlife but although we spent 4 hours on the river, we could not see a single southern river otter. First disappointment. On the other hand, we saw several **coypus** in their original habitat as we can actually see hundreds of them very easily close to where we live in France in the Rhone River delta. We drove at dark to a tiny village where we spent the night in a homestay booked by our local guide along road W-30 I think. The homestay was run by an old lady and her daughter. It was a nice, charming house with comfortable but quite cold rooms. The food was amazing with so much to eat: I've never seen in my life some much meat, bread and cakes served for diner. Our stomachs were so full that we had to refuse to eat several of the dishes the ladies cooked for us and we felt a bit ashamed. On the following day, we had a long drive to the South of the Island to Queilen for a whale watching tour we booked with the hope to see dolphins and especially Chilean dolphins since according to several past trip reports the southern part of the island was supposed to be good for such species. The weather on that day was gorgeous: sunny with no clouds (not very common here) and quite warm with not a pinch of wind. The boat ride was lovely: we saw many birds and **sea lions** but not a single dolphin in view. After a couple of hours things were getting quiet and then the crew offered to all the guests a lunch consisting of local mussels and white wine. We were not expecting this, so it was a nice surprise, and the mussels were excellent. Of course, while we were enjoying the lunch, a **Peale's dolphin** showed up and jumped close to the boat offering us nice views but by the time we ran off the table and took our cameras, the show was over. Damned! After another couple of hours, we saw nothing else and came back to the pier. Conclusion of this whale watching tour: superb weather, nice boat, crew and lunch but only one Peale's and no Chilean dolphin observed. Second disappointment. We did not observe either any Chilean dolphin from the shore while we were driving up north towards our next destination: the Tepuhueico Park where we would stay 3 full days/nights. We took roads W-80 and W-856 to enter the park from the Northeast Gate as the bridge over Rio Bravo was open, which allowed us to drive up to Tepuhueico Lodge where our guide could book us a cabin. This was an amazing 3-floored cabin just for the two of us although it could sleep 6 to 8 persons! We were making our food by ourselves in the fully equipped cabins. We had no other choice as the main lodge was actually closed for refurbishing. During the 3 days/nights spent in the park, we drove many times back and forth the dirt roads within the park or hiked along tracks in various sections of the park, we spent hours spotlighting at night or hiding in various places near the Gate where a kodkod was spotted a few times before our arrival but we had no luck as we saw nothing

except for a few pudus (which by the way were shy and not seen very well) and one lesser grison we saw by accident on the side of the road and was unexpected even by our guide so it was a nice bonus. We could also observe and identify with no doubt a **cinnamon red bat** during our spotlighting session from our cabin. I was very surprised, to say the least, about how silent the forest was. Seeing very few or no mammals in one thing, but not seeing nor hearing birds was very strange to me given the forest biotope. The animals were there for sure: the local rangers and lodge workers showed us pics or movies taken with their cell phone just a few days before we arrived but, on our side, we saw no Darwin's fox and no kodkod. I knew the cat would be tough to see but frankly speaking, I thought the fox would have been easier to see. I guess we were unlucky, but this was then the third disappointment for the Chiloé visit. On a side note, I must mention there was some quite heavy logging taking place around the lodge during our stay, which was creating lots of noise and I guess perturbations to the wildlife. In his recent 2021/22 trip report, Rob Jansen was also mentioning the fact he could not find any river otter, Darwin's fox or kodkod during his visit so maybe the animals are simply becoming more rare and more difficult to see compared to several years ago. Our guide could not really say if this was a real trend or not. Having said that, during our last night session near the Gate where the rangers told us they "regularly" saw kodkod on a road turn and after several hours waiting there in our car, our guide suddenly shouted at us that a kodkod was crossing the road but both my wife and I saw nothing although we kept on looking to the right direction. I'll give our guide credit for honesty but if the cat was really there, I can say it did not stay on the road more than a few seconds and therefore, I'm not sure I would have considered it in our mammal list as seeing only glimpse of animals doesn't really count for us. Anyway, we absolutely saw nothing so there is no debate 😊. On the last day, we left the park early for the long drive back to Puerto Montt to catch our domestic flight to Punta Arenas. So as to finish our Chiloé visit in beauty, the weather dramatically changed with heavy rain all the way up to the airport and when we entered the terminal to get our tickets, we were told our flight was cancelled and postponed to the following day. Damned! At least the company paid for all the extras (night and meal) incurred by the cancellation. Fourth and last disappointment. As you understood, we won't definitely keep a memorable souvenir of Chiloé Island even if to be honest we saw some cool local birds and a lesser grison, which was not expected.

Patagonia:

As mentioned in the previous section, we arrived in Punta Arenas one day later than expected due to the domestic flight cancellation from Puerto Montt. As a result, we could not cross the Strait of Magellan with the ferry from Punta Arenas to Porvenir to visit Tierra del Fuego and the king penguin colony in Baya Inutil. Upon arrival at the airport on a rainy day we had to change our plan at the last minute with our local guide and decided to drive straight to Punta Delgada for the ferry crossing there and spend the following night in the North of Tierra del Fuego only. On the drive to Punta Delgada along roads 9, 255 and 257, we observed many Darwin rheas and one cute **Humboldt's Hog-nosed Skunk** quickly crossing the road in front of our car. We of course also observed tons of **guanacos** through the whole journey. Since the days are short during wintertime in Southern Chile and due to our flight arrival beginning of the afternoon, we reached Punta Delgada quite late in the afternoon for the ferry crossing. The weather was still rainy, cold with strong wind. As a consequence, the conditions from the ferry deck were not great for nice observations and we only saw two **Peale's dolphins** in the dark. We arrived at night at Cerro Sombrero where we spent the night in a small guesthouse booked by our guide. The accommodation was basic but comfortable and the owners friendly. The room were not very warm and when we wake up the following morning we understood why: the rain and wind had stopped leading to a clear sky full of stars, but it was freezing cold below -10°C. After a nice breakfast we drove back to the ferry crossing with a few stops along the road to observe some interesting birds. We did the ferry crossing 3 times to maximize our chance to see and take photos of Commerson's dolphins. It was probably the coldest hours we've ever spent on a ferry deck for whale watching but it was worth the effort as we could see many **Commerson's dolphins**. On the other hand, none of them were very playful with the boat and we could not take any great pics of dolphins jumping on the ferry waves. Too bad but cool observations anyway. After the ferry, we took again the car to drive to our next stop in Puerto Natales. On the small Y-535 road we had a great observation of another **Hog-nosed skunk**: this individual was very busy foraging the ground in search of food and quite tame so that we could approach him close on foot for photos and enjoy watching him for long minutes. For the rest of the trip to Puerto Natales, the only other mammals we could see were again hundreds of **guanacos** and a few skittish **European hares**. We again arrived at night at the Hotel Hallef, which was an affordable option but surprisingly we were the only guests in this hotel. We could spend some daytime to visit Puerto Natales when we came back from Torres del Paine to realize how nice this little town and the landscape around it are but for now, we left Puerto Natales very early at night to arrive in Torres del Paine early in the morning for sunrise. We drove there through roads 9 and Y-150 with a short stop at Cerro Castillo in Hotel Estancia El Ovejero where we would spend the following 3 nights. It is outside of the national park but proved to be a good location as I will explain later in the report. We arrived at Torres del Paine NP from the East side where the private estancia areas known to be the best spots for pumas are located. As soon as we arrived close to the Sarmiento Gate on road Y-150, we had a very nice but quick observation of a **South American grey fox**. After that we spend the full day roaming along roads Y-150, Y-156 and Y-160 just outside of the park on

the East side. The weather was gorgeous: bright sunny with no wind and the landscape amazing with all these lakes and unique mountain shapes of Torres del Paine. Throughout the day we saw tons of **guanacos**, some cool birds like the mighty condors but of course the stars of the day were 3 **pumas**: a mother with her two grown cubs, that we saw resting on the ground only about 10 meters away from the Y-150 road! What I found amazing is how relaxed they were even with the few cars and all passengers (including us) who got out of the cars to take photos next to them. We could stay close to the pumas for about an hour before they stood up and decided to cross the road literally between people to go down towards the lake out of our view. We could not follow them as this is private land belonging to the estancias and we did not pay (too expensive!) to have the right to follow animals by foot outside of the roads. You'd better follow the rules strictly because the estancia owners/rangers are never far from puma sightings... What a great sighting it was after only one day in the park. We came back to our hotel at night and crossed a few foxes along the road but hard to conclude for sure if they were **culpeos** or **grey foxes**. El Ovejero estancia is super nice with large and comfortable rooms, a great restaurant with an impressive bar and wine list. Amazing to see such a great hotel in a tiny village in the middle of nowhere. On the second day we decided to visit the park itself. The array of roads within the park goes through some great landscapes: mountains, lakes, wetlands, forests and waterfalls that makes it a paradise for landscape photos. On the other hand, we surprisingly saw very little wildlife in the park except for a few birds and of course **guanacos**. Unfortunately, the habituated and tame female **Southern Huemul** that used to be observed near hotel Explora /Camping Pehoe died, and we could not see this species in the park. We came back late in the afternoon in the estancia area where soon enough we saw 2 other **pumas** along road Y-150 but these individuals were quite shy and moving quickly so we could only see them for a few minutes from the road before they disappeared. Anyway, seeing pumas everyday so far was great and we could not complain. On the following day, we decided to spend some more time along road Y-160 from the Amarga Gate. There are some nice water falls there good for torrent duck observation. We saw even more **guanacos** than on the previous days but even with intensive scanning we did not observe any puma. Just before noon, we came back to the estancia area and once again along road Y-150, we met some local Chileans who told us they had spotted two puma cubs up the hills. Indeed, we could see them well through our binoculars, but they were too far for good photos. They were alone apparently waiting for their mum to come back. We decided to wait and see. After waiting for 4 hours, our patience was rewarded as the mother came back and decided to come down the hills with her two cubs towards the road and us. We then had the most wonderful observation of pumas we could have dreamt of: both cubs and mother playing and fighting with each other along the road for more than 30 minutes with all the photographers (we were around 15) following them 10 meters away in silence. They absolutely did not pay attention to us the whole time. After 30 minutes, they decided to rest and sleep in a bush nearby the road. The density of the bush and their color camouflage made them totally invisible. If we hadn't followed them and knew where they were, we could have driven ten times next to the bush without noticing them. We came back to the hotel that night with hundreds of photos and a memorable souvenir we would not forget soon. Actually, we decided to buy a nice bottle of white wine to celebrate this 😊. Having been blessed with great puma sightings during our 3 first days in Torres del Paine, we decided to spend the following day far from the park on the main road between Cerro Castillo and Cerro Guido to search for other mammals like foxes and armadillos. We were again spoiled with several and close observations of both **South American grey foxes** (3 different observations) and **Large Hairy Armadillo** (3 observations but I think we saw the same individual twice): what a strange but cool mammal! We came back to the estancia area near the park in the second half of the afternoon to try once again for pumas, but we saw none... Well, we can't be lucky every day. On the last day, we left our hotel early in the morning to enjoy Puerto Natales with the nice weather we have had so far. We only saw a **culpeo** at dark on the main road during our drive to Puerto Natales. Then we drove back to Punta Arenas with several stops purely for birding. We spent the evening in Punta Arenas and slept at the Hotel Diego de Almagro, a large modern and comfortable hotel but with no charm. For our last day in Southern Chile, we drove south of the city back and forth along road 9, again for some nice birding, but as the road was often close to the shore of the strait of Magellan, we could observe numerous **Peale's dolphins** including several ones jumping out of the water under some nice morning sunlight. Time eventually came to reach the airport to take our long flight back to Santiago, on time for this one. Towards the airport just north of Punta Arenas, we stopped in a small patch of forest for one last birding session. We could not see the targeted Magellanic woodpecker but saw two **European rabbits**. We spent our last night in Chile in Santiago downtown and flew back to France on the following day for an endless but smooth flight to Paris. Crossing the Andes by plane during the day was another and last very nice experience from this country.

As you could read through these lines, we really enjoyed Chile: a beautiful country with amazing landscapes and very friendly people. We loved the Altiplano and Southern Chile areas but didn't have a good experience with Chiloé Island. That's life with wildlife watching. Globally speaking, I found mammal watching difficult in Chile even using local guides. Except for a few tame species like pumas, guanacos, vicuñas and hog-nosed skunks, all the other species we saw were quite skittish or secretive. As such, our list of mammals observed is quite small although we spent 3 weeks in the country (see below). As I wrote in the Chiloé section, I'm also wondering if some mammals are now becoming rarer and more difficult to observe than it used to be some years ago.

Mammals with photos or well seen (lifers in green)				
Species	Espèces	Latin Name	Where seen	Pic
Large Hairy Armadillo	Grand tatou velu	Chaetophractus villosus	3 superb observations on the same day on the roads (Y-150) between Torres del Paine, Cerro Guido and our hotel in Cerro Castillo	X
European Rabbit	Lapin de garenne	Oryctolagus cuniculus	A few seen in a forest patch between Rio Seco/Punta arenas and the airport	X
European Hare	Lièvre d'Europe	Lepus europaeus	Several seen running in the steppes around Punta Delgada	
White-bellied Grass Mouse	Akodont à ventre blanc	Akodon albiventer	1 seen in the fields nearby Putre while scanning for birds	X
Bolivian Big-eared Mouse	Souris bolivienne à grandes oreilles	Auliscomys boliviensis	A colony observed along road CH-11 in the spot of Termas de la Cuevas when reaching the Altiplano	X
Common Mountain Viscacha	Viscache des montagnes	Lagidium viscacia	Common everywhere in the Altiplano	X
Coypu	Ragondin	Myocastor coypus	A few observed here and there in Chiloé island	X
Cinnamon Red Bat	Chauve-souris rouge cannelle	Lasiurus varius	One observed at night from our cabaña in Lodge Tepuhueico in Chiloé	
Peale's Dolphin	Dauphin de Peale	Lagenorhynchus australis	1 observed during our whale watching tour in Chiloé, 2 during our first ferry crossing in Punta Delgada and several along the shores while driving south of Punta Arenas along road 9	X
Commerson's Dolphin	Dauphin de Commerson	Cephalorhynchus commersonii	Several seen during the ferry crossings in Punta Delgada but none were playing in the waves close to the boat to allow good photos	X
Guanaco	Guanaco	Lama guanicoe	3 seen near the road while climbing from Arica to Putre (few kms before Zapahuira). Very common and countless seen in the Altiplano.	X
Vicuña	Vigogne	Vicugna vicugna	Common everywhere in the Altiplano	X
North Andean Huemul	Taruca	Hippocamelus antisensis	Several observed near Putre along road A-149 (usual place) and one very close encounter with a lonely male close to Socoroma (A-213).	X
Southern Pudu	Pudu du Sud	Pudu puda	A few seen in Parque Tepuhueico in Chiloé (never in good conditions) but one nice observation of a female near the Chepu river (along road W-250)	X
Puma	Puma	Puma concolor	Marvelous observations of 8 different pumas (3 females and 5 juveniles), all of them in the estancia area West of Torres del Paine and along road Y-150 only. We saw nothing along roads Y-156 and Y-160 although many hours of observation.	X
Culpeo	Renard de Magellan	Pseudalopex culpaeus	Only one observation, but nice, early morning in the fields near Parinacota village	X
South American Grey Fox	Renard d'Azara	Pseudalopex gymnocercus	One seen in Torres del Paine itself and several others observed along the roads between Puerto Natales, Cerro Castillo and the park	X
South American Sea Lion	Otarie à crinière	Otaria byronia	Commonly observed in Chiloé Island and in Arica (including several dead ones on the shore 😞...)	X
Humboldt's Hog-nosed Skunk	Moufette de Patagonie	Conepatus humboldtii	2 individuals seen very well. 1 crossing the road north of Punta Areas and another one near Punta Delgada (road Y-535)	X
Lesser Grison	Petit grison	Galictis cuja	1 unexpected and super cool observation in Parque Tepuhueico 1km after the northern gate/bridge (access to the park by road).	X
Marine Otter	Loutre marine	Lontra feline	Nice observation of one individual in Arica at the end of the road to Cuevas de Anzota (usual place in the rocks below the parking lot)	X
		Total Species Recorded = 21		

Below two other species that I actually don't count given the observation circumstances				
Kodkod	Kodkod	Leopardus guigna	While spotting at night in Parque Tepuhueico near the northern gate/bridge, our guide shouted at us for a Kodkod crossing the road but we saw nothing although we were looking in the same direction...	
Molina's Hog-nosed Skunk	Moufette des Andes	Conepatus chinga	Sadly 2 dead bodies hit by trucks on road CH-11 above Putre	

I'm adding to this report a few pictures of some of the iconic species we observed during that trip or that were new to me.



Puma



Puma



White-bellied Grass Mouse



Bolivian Big-eared Mouse



Common Mountain Viscacha



Coypu



Peale's Dolphin



Commerson's Dolphin



Guanaco



Vicuña



North Andean Huemul



Southern Pudu



Culpeo



South American Grey Fox



Humboldt's Hog-nosed Skunk



Large Hairy Armadillo



Lesser Grison



Marine Otter



...and Puma again