

# Chile - Just Pumas

Naturetrek Tour Report

4 - 14 April 2013



View



Puma



Puma



Torrent Duck

Report & images kindly compiled by participant Julian Thomas



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## Day 1

Friday 5th April

After a trouble-free flight we arrived in Chile, met up with the rest of the group and our guide for the day, Edward and we were on our way to the Andes. Hazy cloud rolled in during the day, but most of time was spent in warm sunshine. The first Chilean birds were the less than impressive Feral Pigeon and House Sparrow, but also Southern Lapwing and Eared Dove. The access road to the ski resort wound its way up steep rocky slopes, initially covered in scrub and saguaro type cacti (mattoral vegetation), the scrub becoming sparse around 2500m, giving way to Puna vegetation with grasslands, senecios, and mulleins. In the distance impressive high peaks with glaciers dominated the horizon.

We used the tried and trusted technique when mountain birding, of stopping at various altitudes and briefly exploring each area. At 1000m the first stop gave views of Black-chested Buzzard-Eagle and Chilean Flicker, while American Kestrel and Chimango Caracara flew over. In the mattoral vegetation Fire-eyed Diucon, Green-backed Firecrown, Austral Thrush, House Wren, Tufted Tit-tyrant, Common Diuca Finch, and Austral Blackbird were located. Further along the road, at 2000m the first Andean Condors drifted overhead, as we searched the rocky slopes of a ravine for two highly desired endemic species, being rewarded with a Moustached Turca running swiftly between bushes, and a smart Crag Chilia. Long-tailed Meadowlark gave a splash of colour. At this site Condors in some numbers could be seen flying low over the aptly named 'mirador los condores', but by the time we had climbed to this level the birds were more distant, although I got close range flight shots of Variable Hawk.

As we headed to the undoubted eyesore of the ski village the only trees were scattered cottonwoods along the road, and in one of these was a splendid roosting Magellanic Horned Owl, that allowed crippling close views. On a rocky outcrop here a Mountain Viscacha lay sunning itself, and around a wet flush birds seen were Dark-bellied Cinclodes, Greater Yellow Finch, Grey-headed Sierra Finch, Black-chinned and Yellow-rumped Siskin, Mourning Sierra finch, Band-tailed Sierra Finch. The Puna vegetation was riddled with rodent burrows, with most presumably being nocturnal, but we eventually managed views of the endemic burrowing mammal, the Cururo.

The final section of road gave views of the superb Aplomado Falcon, and another Magellanic Horned Owl, roosting at the base of a giant boulder, being mobbed by Rufous-banded Miners, Scale-throated Earth-creeper, and Sharp-billed Canastero. By this time, as typical of mountains, the temperature was rapidly dropping and it was time brave the rush hour traffic and head for the hotel.

## Day 2

Saturday 6th April

The first natural phenomenon of the day passed un-noticed by the rest of the group, as a minor earth tremor shook the hotel at 4.45am. As we taxied out in Santiago a family of Burrowing Owls was seen by the runway. Unfortunately cloud obscured much of the scenery but some impressive glaciers could be seen whenever there were breaks in the cloud. We set off to Puerto Natales with our temporary guide Claudio pointing out features of interest as we travelled through Patagonian steppe and weather-beaten Nothofagus forest. Much of the latter had been destroyed in what I thought must have been recent fires, but Claudio informed us much of this ecological damage took place in the 1950's, the recent appearance testament to the very slow rates of decay and regeneration in this bleak environment. Wildlife seen on the journey included numerous Darwin's Rheas, and big flocks of Upland Geese, and mixed in with them were fewer Ashy-headed Geese and Black-headed Ibis. Wave-lashed saline lakes were decorated with Chilean Flamingos, and Cinereous Harrier, Black-chested Buzzard Eagle, Andean Condors, and Southern Crested Caracaras flew over. The first Guanacos were seen in small herds, with these rather elegant cameloids becoming more common in the park itself.

After an excellent lunch in Puerto Natales a refuelling stop gave an opportunity for some birding along the fjord. Here we met up with Roberto Donoso, whose enthusiasm for showing us the wildlife of Patagonia knew no bounds. He assured us that we would definitely see Pumas, and his confidence proved to be well placed! Chiloe Wigeon were the most common water fowl, but there were also Crested and Spectacled Duck, and Black-necked and Coscoroba Swans. There were hundreds of Imperial Cormorants crowded on a jetty, in addition to Brown-hooded and Dolphin Gulls, with Chilean Skuas harassing some of these birds.

We then continued to the park, stopping only to view two Patagonian Skunks rooting about along the roadside. For most of the day the weather had been fairly wild with ferocious gales and snow flurries, but it improved towards evening as we stopped by a small Nothofagus copse along the road past Cascada Paine and waited at this site, where Roberto had seen two Pumas earlier in the morning. The light was rapidly fading when Jane announced that two Pumas had appeared by the edge of the copse. After a few frantic seconds everyone had located the duo, but the desperate straining of eyes proved to be quite unnecessary as the two Pumas strode along the bank towards us, one sitting just a few yards away and viewing us with apparent curiosity! They exuded an impression of sleek power, but they were not in fact independent adults, but well-grown cubs of around a year old, and when Roberto scanned the slope with the spotlight he located the mother. We were a happy band when we finally made our way to the Hotel las Torres, with this one fantastic encounter removing the pressure for the rest of the trip.

## Day 3

Sunday 7th April

The weather was hugely improved from yesterday, with lighter winds and enough warm sunshine to melt much of yesterday's snow.

Before dawn we left for the site of yesterday's Puma encounter but a wait produced just Chilean Flicker, Condors and Caracaras, and those Guanacos that had survived the night with a Puma on the hunt. We continued along this road, where Roberto showed us a pair of roosting Magellanic Horned Owls in a copse, and along the river a superb male Torrent Duck. As I climbed down for a closer view a Black-chested Buzzard-Eagle gave a great photo op at very close range. The park reception afforded some interest with a Black-billed Shrike-tyrant, and the first of three Grey Foxes seen during the day. All three were amazingly fearless as they slowly foraged over the steppe. Small birds were generally scarce but Rufous-banded Miners and Grey-hooded Sierra-Finch and the southern race of Rufous-collared Sparrow were seen around here.

A walk to a lake with wide grassy margins and much emergent vegetation gave views of Silvery and White-tufted Grebes, Red-gartered Coot, as well as Upland Geese, Chiloe Wigeon and Spectacled Duck. A walk along the boundary fence of the park was an eye opener, as it was clearly a death-trap for Guanacos and Rheas with numerous old and one very fresh Puma kills. Animals were either caught against the wire or became trapped by their hind leg when they leapt in an uphill direction. We found a Guanaco trapped in this way but managed to release it by lifting it back over the fence. It was injured, although a deer in the UK would certainly have survived, but would not, of course have to flee from an apex predator! Condors were predictably numerous here with a cluster of 15 on the hillside above, but after the Guanaco was released many drifted very low overhead scrutinizing us with what would anthropomorphically be considered acute disappointment. Normally I would not interfere with nature, but here the problem was clearly man-made...

At evening we were back at our Puma site but we had no sightings, but I was pleased to get photos of a line of Darwin's Rhea that came running past. American Kestrel, Chilean Flicker, and Magellanic Horned Owl were also seen, and the changing light and cloud gave constantly changing perspectives of the pinnacles and mountain massif.

## Day 4

Monday 8th April

Weather - generally light winds and generally sunny after a cloudy start, and quite warm by the afternoon

The day started early with a spotlighting expedition along the road to Lago Sarmiento, through open tussocky steppe. This produced just a Magellanic Horned Owl and 5 Grey Foxes, until we retraced our route and went along the Rio Paine road. At the edge of a thicket of Antarctic Beech, some 2km from where we first saw the Pumas, one of the cubs was lying in long grass. It then wandered through the thicket before heading to a more distant patch of cover. Meanwhile the other cub had been stalking a hare in the half light of dawn and rushed after it, but the hare was far too fast and agile for an inexperienced hunter. The Puma slunk back into cover, not to be seen again.

After a late breakfast we set off along the same route. With light winds Condors seemed disinclined to fly, and we approached very closely to firstly two juveniles, and then an adult male for fantastic photo opportunities. Dark-faced Ground Tyrant was also seen here. A stop for lunch was made at Lago de los Cisnes. This shallow saline lake presented quite a spectacle, with Chilean Flamingos and Black-necked Swans wading and swimming respectively in a reflection of the snow covered mountain massif above. There were other wildfowl including flying steamer duck, Yellow-billed Pintail, Freckled Teal, Crested Duck, Chiloe Wigeon, and Red-gartered Coots.

There was something of a dearth of small birds in the steppe, but in scrub at the park entrance a patch of scrub held Scaly throated Earthcreepers, Austral Canastero, and Long-tailed Meadowlark.

The large Lago Sarmiento was scenically impressive but appeared lifeless as we settled down for a wait, hoping for a Puma to make its way from daytime lairs to hunting grounds on the slopes above. However with some searching I found 3 Great Grebes before we returned towards the hotel. We had not gone very far before Roberto stopped the minibus and pointed out a Puma on the slope above us. It was in plain view on some bare ground amongst some low bushes, which it duly melted into. However after 15 minutes it roused itself and walked along the slope, this time lying down in the open and going to sleep, before resuming its patrol, and bringing observations to a close.

## Day 5

Tuesday 9th April

Perfect weather for most of the day, with very light or no winds, so the mountain massif was mirrored in every lake, for those clichéd but much loved tourist snaps

We set out at 7.30 am travelling outside the park along the road to Puerto Natales, then heading west along the shore of Lake Sarmiento. We had seen nothing except hares when Jane pointed out a Guanaco on a rock by the lake shore. On realising this Guanaco was in fact a Puma I suggested we stop! The Puma eased itself over the low cliffs along the shore and could not be located in the piles of limestone, which are in fact recent stromatolites. Great Grebes were just offshore here. At Laguna de los Cisnes the flamingos were truanting, although they later returned, but we took close up pictures of squabbling Upland Geese. We searched around the site of last night Puma sighting for a kill, finding nothing, although Guanacos were heard alarm calling in 2 separate areas.

We then travelled west to Salto Grande, enjoying a surfeit of scenery and stopping to view water birds on various lakes such as Lago Mellizas. Avian highlights were amazing views of Great Grebes feeding juveniles and being able to sneak within 20m of a trio of Flying Steamer Ducks. Neotropical Cormorant and Andean Duck were new for the trip. We spent some time searching for a reported kill, but we could not find it, but I did get nice shots of a Southern Caracara that refused to divulge where it might be. We returned to the site of the mornings sightings, but although I thought this was a dead cert we had luck. We returned along the road spotlighting finding a Grey Fox, Patagonian Skunk and Austral Pygmy Owl.

## Day 6

Wednesday 10th April

A dramatic change in the weather with a cold and ferocious wind all day, but the driving rain of the morning gave way to sunshine by the afternoon

We drove to Lago Grey via Lago Sarmiento where we saw Condors, Black-chested buzzard Eagle and Guanacos. At Lago Pehoe and Lago Grey Roberto searched for Huemul or South Andean Deer with the same determination he applies to Puma, but without avail. It was sad to see how much Nothofagus forest had been destroyed by fire but there was still some stunning old growth forest around the lake.

Tapping on tree trunks failed to produce the Magellanic Woodpecker, but compensation was provided by White-crested Elaenia, Patagonian Sierra Finch, and the charismatic Thorn-tailed Rayadito, although I missed the White-throated Tree-runner while photographing the latter species. The lake presented a rather surreal picture dotted as it was with icebergs of astonishing blueness.

The rest of the day proved to be rather frustrating. Returning through Lago Pehoe we heard Huemul had been seen on the slopes above the campsite 30 minutes before our arrival, but they could not be located. Returning along the Lago Sarmiento road some Caracaras indicated the presence of a kill to Roberto and this proved to be the case, but unfortunately there was a photographer squatting next to it. The puma was present, but out of consideration to the photographer Roberto decided we should return there at 6.30pm. After a nail-biting wait that was enlivened by sightings of Rheas and a Peregrine chasing Dark-faced Ground Tyrant we returned to the kill site to find the inevitable has happened and the puma had disappeared. What was particularly annoying was the photographer has placed his hide at an absurdly close position to the kill, so one felt he did not really deserve such consideration.

We returned to the Hotel las Torres, and some compensation for the puma debacle was provided by two excellent Clupeco Foxes feeding on a hare carcass. Altogether a larger, rangier and more jackal-like canid than the 'cute' grey foxes. We returned to the site at night, but there was no sign of the puma, but we saw 2 Patagonian Skunks.

## Day 7

Thursday 11th April

Incredibly clear and sunny with light winds, after a hard overnight frost

The day started with a hike along the park boundary to the Lago Sarmiento ranger station. Birds seen included Grey-flanked Cinclodes, Dark-faced Ground-Tyrant, Spectacled duck, American Kestrel, Chimango and Southern Caracaras, Chilean Flicker, and Condors.

The sightings of Condors here did not quite prepare us for the scene at Lago de los Cisnes, where no fewer than 48 circled around together, many then landing on the top of a nearby hill. On the lake the Chiloe Wigeon, Speckled Teal, Yellow-billed Pintail, Flying Steamer Duck, Black-necked Swans, Crested Duck and Chilean Flamingos had been joined by Coscoroba Swans and Red Shoveler. Waders have hardly been a feature of this trip but around the margins found a Rufous-chested Dotterel, an excellent bird even if was in the dark non-breeding plumage.

I then walked round the slopes above Lago Sarmiento with Roberto. I had heard persistent alarm calls from Guanacos and Roberto was convinced a Puma had passed below us, but our joint efforts failed to locate it. However we did have eyeball to eyeball views of Condor, and we flushed a party of 9 Least Seedsnipe. We could view them on the ground - hardly surprising we failed to see such well camouflaged birds - but they took off again and flew out of sight.

In the evening we re-visited the kill above Lake Sarmiento, and a scan with the spotlight revealed a female Puma with two small cubs lying in vegetation about 70mm from the dead Guanaco. The cubs could be seen suckling and climbing over the female, who was fairly inactive, although she sat up at one point, and finally went to sleep.

It was quite obvious she had already fed and would not be moving for some considerable time so we quietly retreated, well satisfied with our evenings viewing. Just one Grey Fox and Guanacos were seen on the way back.

## Day 8

Friday 12th April

Fairly breezy for most of the day with patchy cloud

Roberto gave us the choice of an early morning excursion with a packed lunch in Puerto Natales or a more formal lunch in Punto Arenas and I was rather pleased when the group opted for the first option. Shortly after dawn we were trekking over the slopes above Lago Sarmiento when a friend of Roberto's caught up with us and gave us the hot news that a Puma was resting on a ridge above a valley. It was still there when we arrived, remaining inactive for 40 minutes before it eased itself to its feet, and then vanished behind the smallest of bushes. Its disappearance was so total I fully understood how I could have failed to locate the Puma yesterday afternoon. In good light and at a range of around 100m this gave me the best opportunity for photography, except this particular Puma lacked that most expressive of Puma features, namely a tail!

As we drove through Nothofagus forest to Puerto Natales Austral Parakeets were seen both perched and in flight, as well as a gathering of Condors, American Kestrel, Caracaras, Upland Geese, Guanacos and Rheas. We continued to Puerto Natales, having a brief lunch stop by the jetty, which as last time was crowded with Imperial Cormorants, Dolphin Gulls, Kelp Gulls and a Chilean Skua, while along the shoreline were Spectacled and Crested Duck, Chiloe Wigeon, and Black-necked and Coscoroba Swans.

It was then a straight run down to Punto Arenas and time to say 'Hasta Luego' to Roberto and Nelson. Two new additions were made to the bird list as we sped along the Magellan Strait, with a Short-eared Owl on a fence post, and Rock Cormorants, at least one of which was specifically identified.

In conclusion it was an excellent and hugely enjoyable trip. I went hoping to see at least one Puma, but thanks to Roberto's intimate knowledge of the cat's behaviour this wish was fulfilled many times over! The list of other mammals and birds was not surprisingly limited but included some spectacular species such as Andean Condor, Torrent Duck, Moustached Turca, Least Seedsnipe, Rufous-chested Dotterel, Magellanic Horned Owl, and Aplomado Falcon. All in a landscape of quite breathtaking beauty and wildness!

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## Birds - Systematic list

This follows Jamarillo, Birds of Chile.

**White-tufted Grebe** *Rolandia rolland*. A fairly common species on lakes and small pools at Torres del Paine, with 1 to 20 recorded most days.

**Silvery Grebe** *Podiceps occipitalis*. This Black-necked look alike was less widespread than White-tufted, but sometimes numerous where it occurred, with c200 seen on one lake.

**Great Grebe** *Podiceps major*. This rather impressive bird was first seen on Lake Sarmiento, and it would be interesting to know what fish swim in its strongly alkaline waters. At Lago Mellizas we had really close views of juveniles being fed; unlike the decorous way that GC Grebes offer fish the juvenile took the fish in a high speed lunge.

**Neotropic Cormorant** *Phalacrocorax brasilianus*. Five birds seen on Lago Pehoe.

**Rock Cormorant** *Phalacrocorax magellanicus*. There was no time to stop to view huge numbers of birds on nesting platforms in the Magellan Strait, but at least one bird seen in flight had the black neck and breast of this species.

**Imperial Cormorant** *Phalacrocorax atriceps*. Some 150 were present at Puerto Natales, with many crowded on the ruined jetty, and flocks flying past at sea. A very stylish seabird.

**Darwin's Rhea**. *Pterocnemia pennata*. This species was seen daily in Torres del Paine, with many flocks also in Patagonian Steppe on journeys. 7-50 were seen daily. It was a rather comical sight to see a line of Rheas running over the steppe.

**Cattle Egret** *Bulbulcus ibis*. Two birds were seen south of Puerto Natales. Apparently this species has been numerous this year, but most perish in the Patagonian Winter, as they fail to migrate north as conditions deteriorate.

**Black-faced Ibis** *Theristicus melanopis*. This rather smart bird was commonly seen in grassland on the journey to Torres del Paine, but it appeared to be absent from the park.

**Chilean Flamingo** *Phoenicopterus chilensis*. Flocks were an expected sight on shallow alkaline lagoons along the road to Torres del Paine, while some 20 birds on Lago de los Cisnes allowed lengthy perusal.

**Coscoroba Swan** *Coscoroba coscoroba*. Ten birds were seen along the shoreline at Puerto Natales, and 8 flew in past snow clad peaks to land on Lago de los Cisnes.

**Black-necked Swan** *Cygnus melancoryphus*. A widespread species, with many along the coast at Puerto Natales, and on most large water bodies in Torres del Paine. Many family groups with cygnets were seen.

**Ashy-headed Goose** *Chloephaga poliocephala*. The only examples of this beautiful goose were seen during the drive to Torres de Paine, at least 10 birds loosely associated with the larger Upland Geese.

**Upland Goose** *Chloephaga picta*. Another rather striking species, this was very common in Patagonian Steppe, with thousands seen in large flocks as well as smaller gatherings. Very photogenic birds at Lago de los Cisnes allowed a close approach.

**Flying Steamer-Duck** *Tachyeres patachonicus*. There were usually 1-3 examples of bulky duck at Lago de los Cisnes, while a pair resting on the shore of a small lake above Lago Sarmiento allowed an amazingly close approach.

**Spectacled Duck** *Specularius specularis*. This species was first seen along the shoreline at Puerto Natales, and was regularly seen in small numbers on lakes and marshes in Torres del Paine, with 2-6 seen daily.

**Crested Duck** *Lophonetta specularoides*. This species was seen along the shore at Puerto Natales, and was commonly seen in Torres del Paine, with c30 birds seen daily, generally in small flocks, although 'Birds of Chile' suggests it is normally seen in pairs.

**Torrent Duck** *Merganetta armata*. Always a stunning species, a male was found on a rock in the Rio Paine, and I was able to take reasonable photos of this iconic bird.

**Yellow-billed Pintail** *Anas georgica*. Numbers seen on Lago de los Cisnes, with 100+ present most times we passed the site.

**Speckled Teal** *Anas flavirostris*. Small numbers seen regularly on lagoons and wetlands in Torres del Paine, all of the southern race, *flavirostris*.

**Chiloe Wigeon** *Anas sibilatrix*. A striking species, with similar white wing patches and whistling call to Eurasian Wigeon, it was present in large numbers along the coast at Puerto Natales, and at Lago de los Cisnes, some 300 were seen, wheeling around noisy flocks when a Peregrine flew through.

**Red Shoveler** *Anas platalea*. A pair was found amongst the hordes of other ducks at Lago de los Cisnes.

**Andean Duck** *Oxyura ferruginea*. Four examples seen on a reed fringed lake at Torres del Paine.

**Andean Condor** *Vultur gryphus*. I had previously seen this species in Peru but that distant view of a single bird hardly compared to the experiences with this species in the Andes at Santiago, where 15 were seen, and in Torres del Paine, where we had eyeball to eyeball views of birds sailing past, amazingly close views of birds on the ground, and saw no fewer than 48 soaring together.

**Black-chested Buzzard-Eagle** *Geranoaetus melanoleucus*. This large raptor was commonly seen in the Andes at Santiago, where it was almost always being mobbed by American Kestrels, and in Patagonia, with 1-5 seen daily. I was very pleased to take some stunning flight shots of this species.

**Cinereous Harrier** *Circus cinereus*. Two birds were seen, one a smart adult male cruising over Patagonian Steppe near Puerto Natales.

**Variable Hawk** *Buteo polyosoma*. Fairly common in the Andes above Santiago, where c5 were seen, not surprisingly considering the abundance of rodents in the puna areas.

**Southern Caracara** *Caracara plancus*. A common species in Patagonian steppe, and at Torres del Paine, with 4 - 20 seen daily, usually in pairs.

**Chimango Caracara** *Milvago chimango*. Fairly common at Torres del Paine, and the Andes at Santiago, usually in loose noisy flocks.

**American Kestrel** *Falco sparverius*. A beautifully marked little raptor, this species was quite common at Torres del Paine, with 2-5 birds seen daily.

**Aplomado Falcon** *Falco femoralis*. Four examples of this superb species were seen in the Andes above Santiago. Extremely elegant in Eleanora like flight, and beautifully marked, seeing this species was definitely a trip highlight.

**Peregrine Falcon** *Falco peregrinus*. A juvenile was chasing Dark-faced Ground-Tyrants without success above Lago Sarmiento. Sadly I failed to get a single focused image as it shot past at very close range. At Lago de los Cisnes an adult bird showed features of 'Pallid Falcon'.

**Red-gartered Coot** *Fulica armillata*. A few examples seen on most reed fringed lakes in Torres del Paine. I must admit I did not check all coots seen for other species such as White-winged.

**Southern Lapwing** *Vanellus chilensis*. It cannot be said waders were a feature of the trip, but a few examples seen on traffic roundabouts in Santiago.

**Rufous-Chested Dotterel** *Charadrius modestus*. One example was found around the margins of Lago de los Cisnes on 11th April, sadly in the rather dark winter plumage, as opposed to the stunning breeding plumage.

**South American Snipe** *Gallinago magellanica*. Only seen by Roberto as he tramped through a bog at night searching for a puma kill.

**Least Seedsnipe** *Thinocorus rumicivorus*. Much of the habitat around Lago Sarmiento looked ideal for this species, but it must occur at a very low density. However we eventually flushed a flock of 10 at our feet. They settled briefly within view and I these extremely well camouflaged birds running about like larks, but they flew out of sight before I could take a photo. Nevertheless still a highlight of the trip.

**Chilean Skua** *Stercorarius chilensis*. About 10 were seen at Puerto Natales on 6th April, with just one on the 12th, although I had better views of this bird as it harried Imperial Cormorants.

**Kelp Gull** *Larus dominicanus*. About 50 examples were seen along the Magellan Strait, and at Puerto Natales.

**Dolphin Gull** *Larus scoresbii*. This distinctive and chunky gull was seen on the jetty at Puerto Natales, with 30-40 seen on both our stops there.

**Brown-hooded Gull** *Larus maculipennis*. Some 20 examples of this species, that resembles Black-headed flew offshore at Puerto Natales on 6th April.

**Eared Dove** *Zenaida auriculata*. This was a common species in and around Santiago.

**Austral Parakeet** *Enicognathus ferrugineus*. A few birds were seen perched in or flying over Nothofagus forest as we drove to Punto Arenas on 12th April.

**Magellanic Horned Owl** *Bubo magellanicus*. We had fantastic close views of roosting birds at various locations, all of which tolerated a close approach. Two were found on 5th April, with one roosting in a cottonwood below the ski village, and another on a cliff, where it was being mobbed by a variety of small birds. Roberto showed us two birds in a Nothofagus copse in Torres del Paine, and we spotlighted two birds around Hotel Torres. Assuming they can kill an adult Brown Hare, they would hardly struggle to find prey here.

**Short-eared Owl** *Asio flamens*. One was found perched on a fence post close to Punto Arenas on 13th April.

**Austral Pygmy-Owl** *Glaucidium nanum*. As we travelled back at dusk I spotted one of these tiny predators on a dead branch, and it obligingly allowed a close approach for some reasonable photos.

**Burrowing Owl** *Athene cunicularia*. At least three birds were seen around their burrows alongside the runways at Santiago Airport as we taxied out for the flight to Punto Arenas.

**Green-backed Firecrown** *Sephanoides sephanoides*. The only hummingbird seen was one of this species at low altitude in the Andes above Santiago on 5th April.

**Chilean Flicker** *Colaptes pitius*. One was seen in the Andes above Santiago, and birds were seen most days in Torres del Paine. It was usually seen in pairs or or trios, in very small Nothofagus copses. Also seen foraging on the ground in the style of a Green Woodpecker.

**Rufous-banded Miner** *Geositta rufipennis*. About 10 examples were seen around 2500m in the Andes above Santiago on 5th April.

**Common Miner** *Geositta cunicularia*. Several examples were seen around cliffs near the park entrance on 7th April, presumably of the Patagonian race, *cunicularia*.

**Scale-throated Earthcreeper** *Upucerthia dumetaria*. One was seen mobbing an owl in the Andes above Santiago, and a second foraged on the ground at the park entrance at Torres del Paine.

**Crag Chilia** *Chilia melanura*. Three examples of this rather eye-catching endemic were seen in the Andes above Santiago. I had expected to see this species hopping around vertical rock faces, but they foraged on the ground and spent much time skulking in bushes.

**Grey-flanked Cinclodes** *Cinclodes oustaleti*. A few birds seen foraging on the ground on scrubby hillsides in Torres del Paine.

**Dark-bellied Cinclodes** *Cinclodes patagonicus*. A few birds were seen along mountain streams and wet flushes below the ski station in the Andes above Santiago.

**Bar-winged Cinclodes** *Cinclodes fuscus*. One bird at least seen below the ski station in the Andes above Santiago.

**White-throated Treerunner** *Pygarrhichus albogularis*. I missed this bird. that was seen by everyone else as I concentrated on photographing the Rayadito in old growth forest at Lago Grey.

**Thorn-tailed Rayadito** *Aphrastura spinicauda*. A crisply marked and very active bird, two pairs were seen in old growth Nothofagus at Lago Grey, foraging at every level from canopy to understory, and often hanging upside down like a tit.

**Plain-mantled Tit-Spinetail** *Leptasthenura aegithaloides*. Birds were seen in matorral on the lower slopes of the Andes on 5th April.

**Sharp-billed Canastero** *Canastero pyrrholeuca*. Birds obligingly came out from cover to mob a Magellanic Owl in the Andes above Santiago.

**Austral Canastero** *Asthenes anthoides*. This species was quite common in scrub at Torres del Paine, and I got some good photos of what appeared to be a rather skulking species.

**Moustached Turca** *Pteroptochos megapodius*. This endemic proved to be rather easier to see Tapaculos I had previously encountered, as although they spent much time in bushes they could be seen running quail like between patches of cover, or displaying on boulders. Definitely a trip highlight.

**Black-billed Shrike Tyrant** *Agriornis montana*. A very tame bird showed well at the park entrance on 7-8th April.

**Dark-faced Ground-Tyrant** *Muscisaxicola maclovina*. This species was quite common in steppe, at Torres del Paine, typically in wandering flocks of 5-20 birds.

**Fire-eyed Diucon** *Xolmis pyrope*. A pair were seen in matorral in the Andes, and a few examples were seen along edges of Nothofagus in Torres del Paine.

**White-crested Elaenia** *Elaenia albiceps*. A trio were seen in the canopy of old growth Nothofagus forest at Lago Grey.

**Tufted Tit-Tyrant** *Anairetes parulus*. A pair were seen in matorral on the lower slopes of the Andes above Santiago.

**Southern House Wren** *Troglodytes musculus*. This species was seen in locations ranging from city parks to scrub patches in Patagonian steppe.

**Austral Thrush** *Turdus falcklandii*. This species was seen in matorral in the Andes, and was also common in parks in Santiago, but was not seen at all in Patagonia, although the map suggests it occurs throughout Chile.

**Chilean Mockingbird** *Mimus tenca*. This endemic was common and easy to see with birds perched on wires, or feeding on the ground in matorral on the lower slopes of the Andes above Santiago.

**Greater Yellow-Finch** *Sicalis auriventris*. Just one bird was seen on rocky alpine slopes below the ski station on 5th April.

**Austral Blackbird** *Curaeus curaens*. Several flocks of birds were seen in matorral in the Andes, totaling about 150, while it was seen daily in smaller numbers in Patagonia.

**Long-tailed Meadowlark** *Sturnella loyca*. Just one bird was seen in the Andes, while it was common in scrubby areas in Patagonia with 5 to 40 seen daily, the showy males often giving their somewhat uninspired song from the tops of bushes.

**Patagonian Sierra-finch** *Phrygilus patagonicus*. This species was only seen in the canopy of old growth Nothofagus forest at Lago Grey.

**Grey-hooded Sierra-finch** *Phrygilus gayi*. This species was seen in alpine areas below the ski station, and was seen daily in Patagonia, usually in scrubby areas.

**Mourning Sierra-Finch** *Phrygilus fruticeti*. This species was quite common in scrub on the slopes of the Andes above Santiago, and 10 birds were seen on 7th April in Patagonia.

**Band-tailed Sierra-Finch** *Phrygilus alaudinus*. About 5 birds seen below the ski Station in the Andes.

**Common Diuca-Finch** *Diuca diuca*. Some 20 birds were found feeding along roadsides on the lower slopes of the Andes on 5th April.

**Rufous-collared Sparrow** *Zonotrichia capensis*. Fairly frequent in scrub in Andean slopes, and in Patagonia, where the birds were of the race *australis*, that lacks crown stripes.

**Black-chinned Siskin** *Carduelis barbatus*. Several family parties, with adults still feeding young were seen below the ski station in the Andes above Santiago.

**Yellow-rumped Siskin** *Carduelis uropygialis*. This is considered to be the alpine species, but was seen in the same areas as Black-chinned in the Andes on 5th April.

## Mammals

**Mountain Viscacha** *Lagidium viscacia*. One individual was seen resting on a pile of rocks below the ski station in the Andes above Santiago.

**Coruro** *Spalocopus cyanus*. This endemic fossorial rodent evaded me at first, while Jane had seen three at the entrance to their burrows, but at a last chance stop below the Condor Mirador restaurant I saw earth being flicked skywards and by a careful approach I obtained some reasonable photos of the heads.

**Guanaco** *Lama guanicoe*. This cameloid was much more than Puma fodder. They were seen daily in large numbers in Patagonia, in all areas from the Magellan Straits to Torres del Paine. Some were seen singly, but they were usually in groups of 5-50 individuals. Males were often seen chasing each other, the pursuing animal trying to bite the other animal. I would assume the skulls we found with sharp curved incisors and canines in the upper jaw were those of males, and they use this weaponry in fighting.

**Grey Fox** *Dusicyon griseus*. This species was quite common in open Patagonian Steppe, with 1-8 animals seen daily. They appeared to be active by both day and night, and were engagingly tame.

**Andean Red Fox** *Dusicyon culpaeus*. This was a larger and more jackal like canid than the 'cute' Grey Fox. They were similarly tame to the grey Foxes and two animals seen scavenging around the grounds of the Hotel las Torres allowed a very close approach.

**Patagonian Skunk** *Conepatus humboldtii*. Seven examples of this species were seen foraging in steppe in Torres del Paine. They moved confidently over the steppe by night and day, frequently stopping to dig for some small food items.

**Puma** *Puma concolor*. Our sightings of this species exceeded our expectations although it was slightly disappointing not to get a really first class image of the species – all views were in poor light, or illuminated at distance with a spotlight, or distant. In the evening of 6/4 two well grown cubs emerged from a thicket of *Nothofagus* at dusk and gave stunning views as they came and peered at us in the minibus. At such close range I forbore from using a flash. They were then joined by the female. The presumed same animals were seen before dawn on the morning of 8/4, 1km distant from where we first saw them. One of the cubs stalked and pursued a Brown Hare, which duly escaped. In the evening an adult Puma gave good views above Lago Sarmiento. Looking at photos of this animal it appears a little emaciated in some shots but fortunately I think this is an illusion. On the 9/1 Jane and I found our own Puma! It was resting on a rock on the shoreline of Lago Sarmiento and quickly disappeared into the stromatolite boulders. At night on 11/4 Roberto spotlighted a female with two small cubs lying close to her kill (a Guanaco) above Lago Sarmiento. Finally a cub (I guess 4-6 months old) was found on a ridge in daylight. It was only when it moved and disappeared behind the smallest of bushes that I realized it had no tail!

**Brown Hare** *Lepus capensis*. Abundant in the lower, better vegetated areas in Torres del Paine. They were fairly strictly nocturnal. Although this is an alien species it is an important prey species and does not appear to have supplanted any native species, so might be regarded as a fairly benign introduction.

**European Rabbit** *Oryctolagus cuniculus*. One seen in the Andes above Santiago.