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Travel report Chile 2020

Mammals

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Mammals

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Introduction

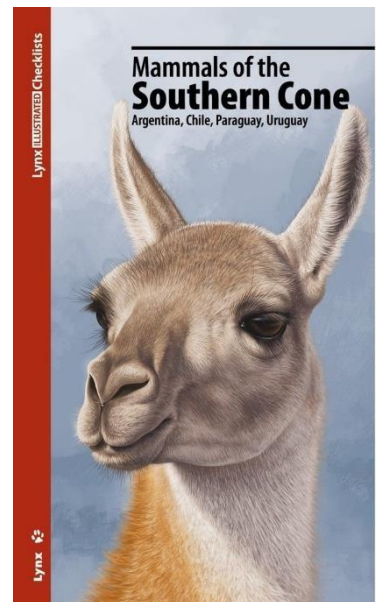
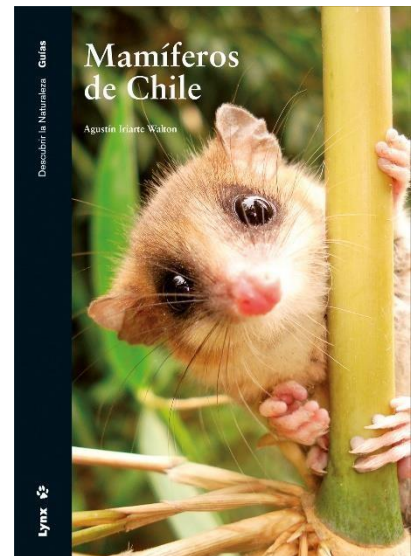
In 2020 there was quite a bit of bad press about Chile. When I went to Chile in 2020 the protests in Santiago were still going on. But luckily they were not as bad as they had been a few months before when the subway system was partially destroyed. During my stay there where only small peaceful protests in front of the police office. Normally I found that most people in Chile are very nice peaceful and friendly. I never felt scared or in danger anywhere during my trip.

There is also some literature for the mammals of Chile. I got lucky and I got one of the last Mamíferos de Chile copies. If you can get one of these books from somewhere it is very informative. With quite some info on behavior and biology.

The new mammals of the southern cone is a very nice work to get acquainted with the species of the region. Sadly I have not had this book during my trip because it was published at the time when I was in Chile.

Otherwise it might be a very good idea to bring a scope to search the Torres del Paine Mountains for Pumas or look over the oceans for marine mammals.

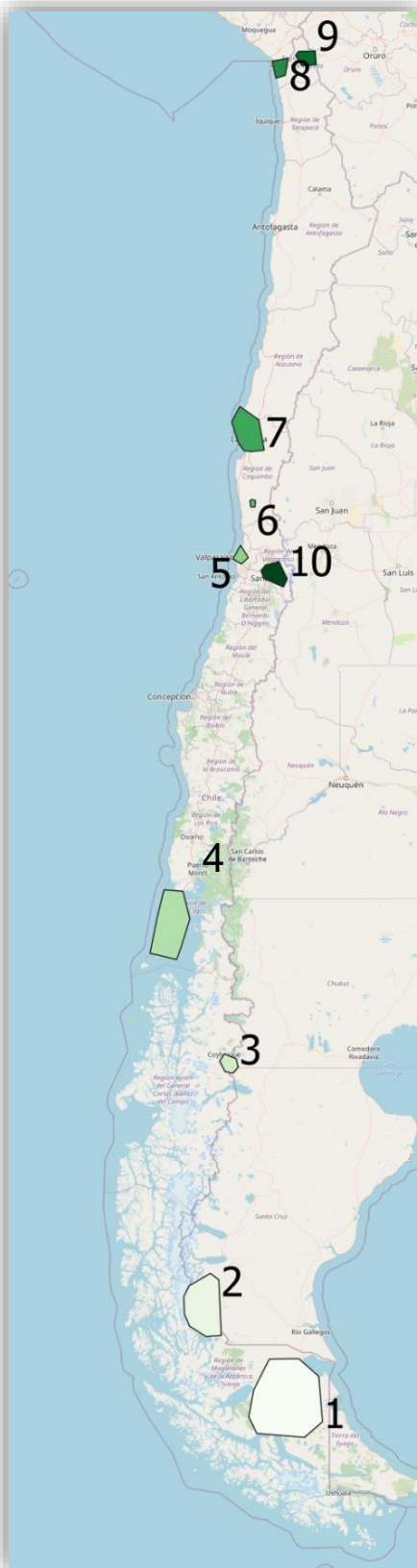
Another helpful tool must be a heat camera sadly enough I did not have one. I think these might be a great help for searching all the really cool cat species that can be found in Chile. But it probably will also be very helpful to find loads of other mammals like Darwin's fox. Or for example to find Coruro's when they move to new burrows.



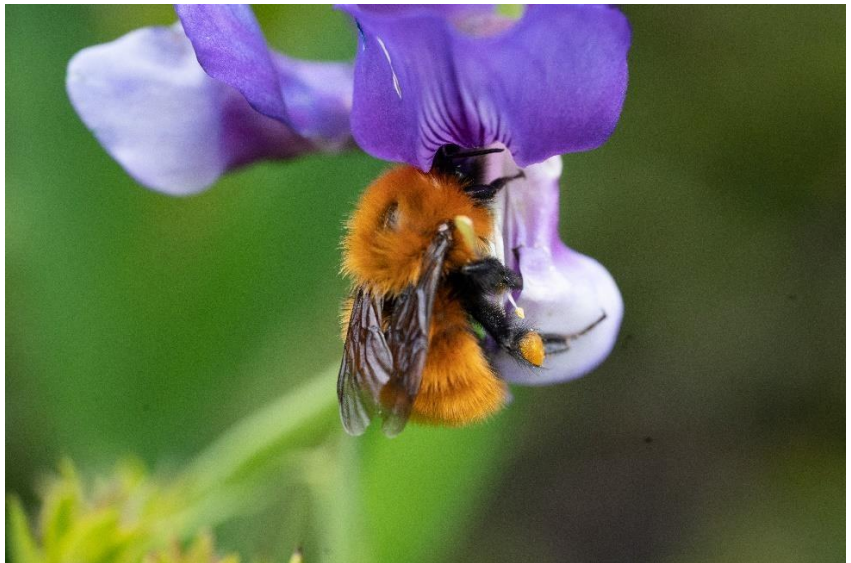
If you are interested in any of the other species groups or want to see some more pictures you can go here:

| | | |
|------------------|-----------------------------|--|
| My polarsteps: | Polarsteps | (Pictures and road map) |
| My observations: | Observation | (Complete bird & mammal list) |
| | Inaturalist | (I have some species on here I haven't uploaded to observation mostly plant species) |

Feel free to ask any questions



- 1** Puerto Lopez area
- 2** Torres del Paine area
- 3** Balmaceda area
- 4** Chiloe island
- 5** Valpariso area
- 6** Illapel area
- 7** La Serena
- 8** Arica area (lowlands)
- 9** Putre Area (highlands)
- 10** Santiago Area (highlands)



BOMBUS DAHLBOMII

Travel experience

Punta Arenas



Species list

| | |
|------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| 1. Peale's Dolphin | <i>Lagenorhynchus australis</i> |
| 2. Sei whale | <i>Balaenoptera borealis</i> |
| 3. Commerson's Dolphin | <i>Cephalorhynchus commersonii</i> |
| 4. South American sea lion | <i>Otaria byronia</i> |
| 5. Culpeo | <i>Lycalopex culpaeus</i> |
| 6. South American grey fox | <i>Lycalopex griseus</i> |
| 7. Guanaco | <i>Lama guanicoe</i> |
| Large hairy armadillo ¹ | <i>Chaetophractus villosus</i> |
| Llama ² | <i>Lama glama</i> |
| European hare ³ | <i>Lepus europaeus</i> |

¹ Only dead specimen & burrows

² Domesticated species

³ Nonnative species

What to do

Guided excursions:

- Boat trip to Isla Magdalena & Beagle Channel
- Ferries to Tierra del Fuego
- Patagonian steppes

How to get there

I had a flight from Santiago to Punta Arenas.

Travel log

The main goals around Punta Arenas for the mammals were the cetacean mammals and the mammals that live in the Patagonian steppes.

In Punta Arenas I had a hotel with direct views on the Magallanic straits called entre vientos. From the balcony of the chill area I had some great views of Peale's dolphins and saw the blows of whales multiple times but they were unidentifiable as no fins or flukes were seen.

I had multiple days with high waves and strong winds. This made spotting mammals from the boats and shore sometimes very difficult especially when the animals were further away from the shore. Multiple times I saw the blows of whales and they were probably some type of fin whale. The people I spoke to said there are quite a lot of Sei whales in the straits. It seems to be a good place for them because of all the kelp beds present in the straits. But I heard blue whales and fin whales have been seen here as well thus it I can't be sure.

Boat trips

The first day I went on a boat trip to the penguin colony on Isla Magdalena. There are two different options to do this, both have their advantages. The first option is to take a bigger slower boat that only will

go to Isla Magdalena. During this tour it is more likely to see whales as you can stand on a higher deck and you move slower than on the other boat trip.

I heard from two people who used the slow moving boat that they both saw Sei whales and dolphins. One of them said that they got lucky and saw orcas. Their guide and mine told me they are rarely seen in the Magellanic straits but you might be lucky. The other tour use fast travelling boats, the advantage is that you travel to one more island that has a nice colony of South American sea lions (and some other birds). During this trip (I took the fast boat) I also saw a few Peale's dolphin. There is also a price difference of more than 30 dollars if I remember correctly, with the fast boats being more expensive at around 90 euros. You can book this tour at soloexpediciones.com. There is also a third boat expedition offered from Punta Arenas that is mammal related. This is the trip to go see humpbacks in the Beagle Channel south of the most southern point of mainland of South America. A couple I had met had done this trip and they said that after a lot of searching they saw a view humpbacks. This trip is really expensive and with the strong wind in Patagonia I think there are a lot of places where it is loads cheaper and nicer to see humpbacks.

Ferries to Tierra del Fuego

There are two ferries to Tierra del Fuego. I used both during an excursion to see the emperor penguins (can be arranged in the same building as soloexpediciones.com). This was far cheaper then hiring a car and paying the toll for the ferries. The northern ferry (North of Tierra del Fuego) is the place to go if you want to see **Commerson's dolphin**. They ride the bow of the ferry and can easily be seen around the boat.

The Ferry from Porvenir is a ferry ride that takes a lot longer. During this ferry ride it was very windy which made finding and identifying animals difficult. I could see multiple blows of (**Sei?**) **whales** during this crossing and a **South American sea lion** that came close to the boat.

Patagonian steppes

I hired a car for the trip to see the Patagonian steps (The area in between Villa Tehuelches and San Gregorio). When I was travelling there my main goal where not mammals but I still did some interesting observations around this area. One of the exciting species around was the **Large hairy armadillo**. Sadly enough I did not find any living animals but I found multiple burrows and multiple dead once. It seems like this could be a great area to search for these mammals. Another mammal I kept an eye out for are the burrows of the very range restricted magellanic tuco-tuco that should be around this area. I didn't find any animals or burrows and could not find a lot of information about this species. Some other species that I saw on the steppes where the **Guanaco**, **Culpeo**, **South American grey fox** and **European hare**.

External sources

I had not read this before my trip and did never see any mention in any other trip report but [Richard Webb \(2003\)](#) mentioned that he saw 3 pods of **Chilean dolphin** in Seno Skyring, this is in between Punta Arenas and Puerto Natales. It might be worth checking out even though the report is quite old.

Torres del Paine



Species list

- | | |
|--------------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1. Culpeo | <i>Lycalopex culpaeus</i> |
| 2. South American grey fox | <i>Lycalopex griseus</i> |
| 3. Guanaco | <i>Lama guanicoe</i> |
| 4. Humboldt's Hog-nosed skunk | <i>Conepatus humboldtii</i> |
| 5. Puma | <i>Puma concolor</i> |
| 6. Fieldmouse sp. | <i>Abrothrix sp.</i> |
| European hare ¹ | <i>Lepus europaeus</i> |

¹ Nonnative species

What to do

- Visiting Torres del Paine



How to get there

From Punta Arenas there are loads of busses to Puerto Natales, just check rome2rio/bus station for exact time schedules. To get to the park from Puerto Natales you can take a bus to the east entrance. You can also hire a car it is especially recommended if you want to search for pumas at night.



Travel log

Visiting Torres del Paine

The first few days I went to Torres del Paine I stayed in Puerto Natales and got a rental car so I could arrive at the park before all the tourist. The first day I walked around in the south and did not see many mammals but wow the environment is really amazing. During the drive around the park I encountered big groups of **Guanaco's** and a **Culpeo**. Next morning, I planned to leave really early but I had a flat tire so first I needed to wait for the rental to open because you don't want to go into the reserve without a spare. Again, I was far too late for the morning activity. I tried to find some huemuls close to Lago grey but had no luck. But I found some *Bombus dahlbomii* the only native bumblebee of Patagonia and sadly enough critically endangered. The queens are probably the largest bumblebee species in the world. It was also the main reason why I chose Chile for this vacation. On my walk back I saw a **fieldmouse sp.** ([pictures of the mouse](#)). I stayed in the park until closing time and left the park via Amarga. This was very fortunate because just to the east of Laguna Amarga I saw my only **Puma**. Sadly, the light started to disappear very quickly but still I got some great views through my scope. During my drive back I saw a **South American grey fox** at the El Lago Sarmiento viewpoint. The next few nights I spent at Refugio Laguna Amarga. You easily get to Laguna Amarga from Puerto Natales by bus. At this place is a **Humboldt's hog-nosed skunk** that probably lives close by, because I saw it both evenings I was there. Next part is officially **prohibited** so beware. The people at the lodge gave me the tip to search for **Pumas** on a small path that goes up the mountain behind the Laguna Amarga entrance that goes to the Lago Sarmiento entrance. This path should normally be walked with a guide but the volunteers from the lodge that were there at that time went up themselves a few times. They also told me it is no problem to enter the park before opening time. So, I did but without any results. One tip: turn back if you can see the Sarmiento entrance, then at least odds are that you will not get any trouble there and before the Amarga entrance go back on to the road. I also encountered a group with a guide but luckily did not get into any trouble with them. In the evening I walked in the mountains south of Laguna Amarga. These areas should be the hotspot for the **Pumas**. I had no luck although a group with a guide saw some puma in the valley just behind Laguna Amarga (to the east). I also heard that during the period I was in the park a Puma walked along the basecamp. The east part of the park seems definitely to be the place for **Pumas** as the density of **Guanacos** is the highest in the east of the park and just outside the national park around Laguna Amarga.

Information from external sources

[Jono Dashper \(2019, 2020\)](#) mentions that what I described before, walking between the entrances is prohibited but a good place to search for pumas. I want to use this place to again mention that I possibly got lucky but walking here should be done at your own risk.

[Jon Hall \(2009\)](#) & [Nozomojo tours \(2016\)](#) report **Southern Huemul** from the south west corner of the park on the road to Lago Grey. [Matt Andrew \(2019\)](#) mentioned 3 individuals on the hike from Pehoe camping to the viewpoint to the base of the Las Torres mountains (the standard and normally very touristic hike, so best be early).

Balmaceda



Species list

- | | |
|---|--------------------------------|
| 1. Culpeo | <i>Lycalopex culpaeus</i> |
| 2. Humboldt's Hog-nosed skunk | <i>Conepatus humboldtii</i> |
| 3. Patagonian Huemul | <i>Hippocamelus bisulcus</i> |
| European hare ¹ | <i>Lepus europaeus</i> |
| Large hairy armadillo ² | <i>Chaetophractus villosus</i> |

¹ Nonnative species

² Not seen myself

What to do

- Visiting Cerro Castillo

How to get there

From Punta Arenas there are direct flights to Balmaceda. These aren't daily so check beforehand.

Travel log

I stayed for a week at Refugio Los Ñires where I did work in the private reserve in exchange for a free stay including free food (workaway). It was a lot of fun. The main objective here was the huemul because on Inaturalist it looked like there were more consistent sightings of the Huemuls in Cerro Castillo. They are quite easy to find in Cerro Castillo the trick here is they graze higher up away from the road but normally come down in the mornings and evenings to drink water from the river that goes through the park. They build a road directly next to the river so you can see the river and have quite a big chance of Huemuls crossing in front of your car so drive carefully. We went to the park twice once in the middle of the day and once in the evening. During our trip in the evening, we found a female **Southern Huemul** drinking along the river. Around Refugio Los Ñires I saw another **Humboldt's Hog-nosed skunk** at night and armadillos can be found here as well although I didn't see them.

Chiloe



Species list

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| 1. South American sea lion | <i>Otaria byronia</i> |
| 2. Chilean dolphin | <i>Cephalorhynchus eutropia</i> |
| 3. Peale's Dolphin | <i>Lagenorhynchus australis</i> |
| 4. Southern river otter | <i>Lontra provocax</i> |
| 5. Southern pudu | <i>Pudu puda</i> |
| 6. Monito del monte | <i>Dromiciops gliroides</i> |
| 7. Darwin's fox | <i>Lycalopex fulvipes</i> |
| 8. Cinnamon red bat | <i>Lasiurus varius</i> |
| 9. Chilean myotis | <i>Myotis chiloensis</i> |
| 10. Long-clawed mole mouse | <i>Geoxus valdivianus</i> |
| 11. Fieldmouse sp. | <i>Abrothrix sp.</i> |



What to do

- Fairy crossing
- Boat tours (Ocean)
- Southern river otter tour
- Visiting Tantauco national park
- Visiting Chiloe national park

How to get there

Most places on Chiloe Island can be reached by bus. The only exception being Tantauco national park. Although it is possible to go to the park with a bus it is not advisable. This bus only goes once a week. To reserve a spot on the bus you need to go to the headquarters of the national park. These have changed and can be found on this location. [-42.485020,-73.762921](https://www.google.com/maps/place/42.485020,-73.762921). In 2020 the busses went on Tuesdays and probably will always go whenever the park is open because this bus also exchanges staff in the National Park.

Travel log

Cucao

From here you can go to Muelle De Las Almas south of Cucao. From here you can try to scope for marine mammals, there is also a little local colony of **South American sea lion** here. I did not find any other marine mammals. To get there you can take a bus and then you walk for 45 minutes to get there. Close to the Muelle I saw two **Fieldmouse sp.** (probably olivaceous field mouse).

The other place I went to is Parque Nacional Chiloé and also walked in the surrounding area. The walks in the Parque Nacional Chiloe are not very big and the entrance is closed at night but you can enter the park via the road here ([-42.615770, -74.103572](#)) if you want to do a night walk through the park. Within the park I found a dead **Long-clawed mole mouse**. I also was very fortunate to see a **Chilean myotis** flying along the lake bordering the forest during the day. On the night walk around the park in some of the pasture fields there was a little group of bats foraging. I got really lucky because one of the tiny bats flew very close by in the light of my torch and was definitely orange colored. In this region only the **Cinnamon red bat** has this color.

Castro

I did not see mammals directly from Castro but this was the location from where I went to Tantauco national park, the dolphin tours in Quilun and got the bus to Cucao.

Tantauco

Ignore this first paragraph if you just want to read about the mammal watching part.

This was the place to go to in Chiloe but sadly enough hard to get to. There are Monito del Montes, Darwin's fox, Kodkod, Southern river otters and Pudu's. I got in by bus and out via hitchhiking. But best would be to get a car. It is possible to rent a car in Castro but that is not easy and if you don't want to take a car from the mainland, you best contact places beforehand, as they only have very few cars. During the period I was there nothing was available (Chilean summer vacation). The other thing is that it is quite adventurous to go to the park with a non 4x4. It is definitely possible as there were enough city cars at the lodge in Tantauco, but it will definitely not be easy. Lodging is quite expensive so I hired a tent with a colchoneta (sleeping pad). On the website & at the headquarters it says excluding sleeping bag. I expected the "colchoneta" to be a proper sleeping pad since I was specifically told that only a sleeping bag was not included. But the sleeping pad included was only good enough to use as safety to put a proper sleeping pad on top so it doesn't get any leaks. This meant I needed to sleep on the cold ground and struggled every night with not being able to sleep because I had nothing underneath me (blankets and ponchos on top) or because it was too cold (blankets and ponchos underneath me). This totally drained me especially since I stayed up late to go hiking during the night to search for mammals. It was so bad that the day I got out of the park and got to my hostel I needed to squeeze every last drop of energy out, just to walk down the street for some food.

The first advantage of going by car is that you can stop for a longer period or during early mornings/evenings at the park entrance. Here are two habituated **Darwin's foxes**, surely one of the highlights of the park. Sadly I didn't see them during my entrance nor during the exit of the park. I stayed at Chaiguata which is the camp directly next to the lake in the park. Every night I was in the park I searched for Pudu's, Kodkods, Darwin's fox and Monito del Monte. Every night I walked along the main road and saw at least 1 **Pudu**, one of the nights I was lucky enough to see 3 different individuals. The road was also the location where I saw a single **Darwin's fox**. I also saw a single **Monito del Monte** sadly enough only very shortly. This was along the Bosque Hundido trail to the east of the campsite. I only walked the northern part of this trail because this was the nicest forest part within its own little valley along a small river. The rangers said that this was the place to see the **Monito del Monte** but sightings are quite rare and during 3 different nights here I only saw a single individual. I also saw multiple unidentified bats that flew here in between the trees. During the day I also tried to find Coypu and southern river otter but without any success.

Ankud

Central location from where I did the Southern river otter boat tour & Islotes de Puñihuil boat tour. Otherwise I didn't do much. At Islotes de Puñihuil you have the Muelle El Caleuchef. It is a cliff that is next to the ocean. A perfect place to scope for marine mammals. Sadly enough during my 45 minute stay I did not see any marine mammals other than some **South American sea lion** that chill out on the Islotes de Puñihuil.

Boat tours

Quilun dolphin and whale watching

One of the boat tours I have no one seen talking about is the once from: <https://quilun.cl/>. Depending on the season they offer a tour to go watch whales or to go watch dolphins. This is because the whales are only seasonally east of Chiloé. During the period I was there I had no chance to go on a trip with them to see **blue/sei whales**. During their dolphin trips you can see **Paeles/Chilean dolphin** so I went with them in the hopes of seeing the Chilean dolphins. To get to them is easily done by bus from Castro. The tours are quite cheap and enjoyable so if you really want to try for Chilean dolphin you might take the tour a few times, if the first time does not work out. The tour operator said that Chilean dolphins are the shyest and less often seen than Paeles. But during my trip we only encountered the **Chilean dolphin**. Sadly my camera autofocus settings were off so I have no sharp pictures but the boat followed these dolphins for about 10 minutes and we had splendid views of a pod of these beautiful dolphins from quite close by.



Southern river otter

This took me quite a while to find out how to get a tour to search for **Southern river otters**. There are some tours on the Rio Chepu but not early in the morning/late evening when the otters are most active. Also most of the time you won't go up river (where the otters live) but down river. I ended up asking the owner of Hostel submarine Amarillo in Ancud, his phone number is: +56962639677

In the end he organized the tour for me. We went on a boat early in the morning and went up river on the Rio Chepu. The area where you go through is beautiful and after almost being at the end of the river we saw one individual **Southern river otter** for a few minutes. They are really shy and if the boat comes to close they dive under and it takes quite a while to find them back.

Islotes de Puñihuil

The tour agency that I had most contact with was: <https://pinguineraschiloe.cl/web/>
Getting there is possible by bus from Ankud.

At this place most tourist come to see the penguins, but I went there to search for **marine otter** which have been seen here regularly in the past, even in great numbers, but it seems that the population that lives around here is getting smaller and smaller. Lately on Inaturalist there are no sightings and the local guides also told me that they don't see it as often as in the past. If you want to search for this mammal you probably have better odds somewhere else. The other thing I talked to the tour operator about was going to Isla Metalqui. This seems to be the best option and might be the only option to search for **blue whales** in the summer period. But they don't offer the tour regularly anymore because they could not find the blue whales regularly and lots of tourist started complaining. When I was there they did go to the island once but that was for a tour company that booked a full boat in advance. I found it difficult communicating with them when I didn't see them in person. But it might be your best shot to find the blue whales. I would love to hear if anyone is able to get to the island and if they see blue whales.

Ferry to Chiloe

From the ferry I saw a **Peale's dolphin** and **South American sea lion**. Looking at iNaturalist these are the only cetacean mammals seen here. This place is a very good place to watch out for pincoya storm petrel as well. Endemic to this small part of Chile.

External sources

It seems that parque Tantauco is a good place for **Darwin's fox**: [Janco van Gelderen \(2019\)](#)

[Jon Hall \(2009\)](#) saw also **Coypus** on the same river as the Southern river otter boat tour.

Valpariso



Species list

- | | |
|----------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. South American sea lion | <i>Otaria byronia</i> |
| 2. Coypu | <i>Myocastor coypus</i> |
| Coruro ¹ | <i>Spalacopus cyanus</i> |
| Domestic goat ² | <i>Capra hircus</i> |

¹ Loads of burrows also active ones with newly dug up earth but have not seen the animal

² Domestic species

What to do

- Visiting Laguna Mantagua
- Searching marine otter
- Parque natural Cerro Los Pinos

How to get there

Valparaiso and surrounding areas are easily reached by bus or rental car from Santiago.

Travel log

At Laguna Mantagua and also within the city bounds of Vina del Mar I saw **Coypu's**. The one in Vina, I saw during twilight, the other one was during the middle of the day. I tried very hard to find the **Coruros** in Cerro Los Pinos Natural Park. In this park I found loads of burrows. Most of them seemed old and abandoned but there were a few active ones. I stayed until the sun went down but did not see any activity. The second species I really hoped to see but didn't was the marine otter. I tried searching on the coastline for 2 afternoons. Second location where I missed the species.

External

In this area is a degu species (*Octodon lunatus*) that only lives in the surrounding area of Vina del Mar and Valpariso. But this species is nocturnal and probably will be quite difficult to find. Also there are quite some sightings of **lesser grison** in Inaturalist in these areas, probably more than the rest of Chile. But always keep in mind that there might be more sightings because there are more observers around these cities.

Illapel



Species list

- | | |
|--------------------------|----------------------------|
| 1. Atacama myotis | <i>Myotis atacamensis</i> |
| 2. Degu | <i>Octodon degus</i> |
| 3. Culpeo | <i>Lycalopex culpaeus</i> |
| Long-tailed Chinchilla | <i>Chinchilla lanigera</i> |

What to do

- Visiting Reserva Chinchilla

Travel log

In between La Serena and Valparaiso is the little town of Illapel. It is not a touristic place at all and it was my first stop toward the dry Atacama. This little town is nothing special but there is a reserve nearby with one of the very last Long-tailed chinchilla populations, actually it is only one of two known populations. The second population being discovered quite recently. I went to the reserve early in the morning and got a little tour. They keep some native mammal species including a few chinchillas in enclosures for educational purposes. The moment I was in the reserve it was the middle of summer and most of the trails were closed off sadly enough. This is because of the fire hazard in the nature reserves. Although most trails were closed I still saw a culpeo. Next to the location of the park ranger station is a little colony of Degus. These are a lot of fun to observe around the burrows. Another special and endangered mammal that hangs around this area is the Atacama myotis which can be found hanging on the roof.

I am quite sure that during sun set there were also groups of this bat flying over Illapel so they seem to be present at multiple locations in this area. A last word about the Chinchillas. If you want to see them, your best odds are to ask the rangers beforehand if it is possible to do a night hike (probably best done with a heat camera). Odds are you have a bigger chance of them saying yes in any other season than summer. As far as I could see the reserve has people staying at the reserve overnight and the reserve is surrounded by a metal fence so I would not advise to sneak into the park without permission during the night.

La Serena



Species list

1. South American grey fox *Lycalopex griseus*
2. Guanaco *Lama guanicoe*
3. **South American fur seal** *Arctocephalus australis*
4. **Common bottlenose dolphin** *Tursiops truncates*
5. **Fin whale** *Balaenoptera physalus*



What to do

- Boat tours

How to get there (and tour companies)

North of La Serena you have the Reserva Nacional pinguino de Humboldt. This is one of the few places in Chile where there are whale watching tours. Tours start from two different locations (Punta de Choros & Caleta Chanaral). There are multiple ways to go there and do a tour. First there are loads of agencies in La Serena that offer to go from the city and take you to do a boat tour at one of the two locations and they almost always go to some local farms in the afternoon. It is quite expensive to go with one of these agencies and the cultural part did not really appeal to me. Second possibility is by bus see appendix 1 for more information. The last option is to rent a car. During the summer vacation in Chile this is quite a hassle if you do not reserve in advance. In the end I took the last option because it gave me the opportunity to do a boat tour at both locations. I reserved my seat for the tours beforehand with these tour companies: *Tourismo punta de choros* and *turismo orca*. I don't know if it is necessary to reserve in advance, loads of people just arrived and bought a ticket at the office but I wanted to be sure.

Travel log

On my way up to Punta de Choros early in the morning I saw to groups of **guanacos** along the D-110 in the valley before el Totoral. From there it was on to the first boat trip. It was amazing to see all the seabirds flying on to the ocean early in the morning, there were also quite a few Peruvian

diving petrels. But back to the mammals, although I kept my eyes out for otters I did not see them. This should be one of the better places to see them with regular sightings on both boat tours. On the first boat trip there where multiple **South American fur seals** chilling out on the rocks around the islands. During this trip you are allowed to go on one of the islands and take a small walk. This island has a cool Liolaemus (lizard). If it is a color variation or an endemic species I do not know and I could not find any information on the internet that gave a defined answer. At least it is a unique and nice little critter to look for. I also brought my scope and searched the ocean for some more cetaceans during the stay on the island but I did not see anything until we went back to the coast. On our way back to Punta de Choros I saw a **Common bottlenose dolphin**. After searching the coast along the town and not finding any otters I headed to the second location. On maps it looked like a great place to do some mammal scoping from the coastline. The little peninsula that stretches out into the ocean is all private property and you cannot really get up the cliffs. The same is true for the cliffs to the south. Only the cliffs to the north give some opportunities to scope over the ocean.

During the second boat trip with Turismo Orca we quite quickly found 2 **fin whales**. Because of the experience of the boat drivers we could see the whales come up for breathing multiple times before we went to the island. At the island here are a few big **South American fur seal colonies** that they will show you. Again it was time to go home at the end of the day. During my way back there where quite some individuals of **South American grey fox** hanging out at this spot ([29.320051, -71.238881](#)). I think they get fed some scraps by the tourists sometimes because they were not shy at all.



EXTERNAL

On Inaturalist there is quite a nice list of species that has been seen here. These include sightings of multiple **Souther Elephant seal**. The list of cetaceans is also quite nice with (most sightings first):

- Fin whale**
- Common bottlenose dolphin,**
- Humpback whale,**
- Risso's whale**
- Blue whale**
- Dusky dolphin**
- Orca**
- Long-finned pilot whale**
- Southern right whale**
- Antarctic minke whale**

This area is not only good for marine mammals but there is also an endemic rodent in the Choros area:

[Eligmodontia dunaris:](#)

Arica



Species list

- | | |
|------------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. South American sea lion | <i>Otaria byronia</i> |
| 2. Marine otter | <i>Lontra felina</i> |
| 3. Common vampire bat | <i>Desmodus rotundus</i> |

What to do

- Cuevas de Anzota
- Whale watching
- Boat tour

How to get there

Arica is easily reached by airplane from Santiago.

Travel log

During my stay in Arica I tried to see some cetacean. This area should actually be quite good for marine mammals but it is difficult to find an opportunity to go out to ocean. The only thing I could find was the pelagic trips offered by albatross birding. These are quite expensive and during the period I was in Arica there was no pelagic so my best option: Scoping the ocean. Sadly enough I spend a whole morning without seeing any cetacean. I tried my luck in the area just south of the harbor where the lighthouse stands on a tiny peninsula stretching out to the ocean. I think it might be one of the better spots to scope. You are a few meters higher than the ocean and a little further out in the water than from the beach. Another option might be trying to get some local fishermen to take you out to ocean. I do not know if it is possible but they seem to already run little tours around the harbor. Here you can see some sea lions hanging around. During my stay in Arica I also went to Cuevas de Anzota twice because this seemed a place where it was possible to see the marine otters and as an added bonus some **Common vampire bats**. The vampire bats were found quite easily, a good description of the location can be found in [Jon Hall \(2018\)](#). The first visit I did not find any otters but the second time after I had given up hope, not seeing these animals in Chiloe, Valpariso, Vina del Mar, La Serena and now in Arica after visiting twice and already leaving the entrance behind me. I walked back to my car, defeated. But then I saw something moving in the water. The ocean was rough but yes sure enough. It was an otter FINALLY. The **Marine otter** was swimming very close to the coast in between some rocks. Sadly enough it disappeared quickly between the rocks and the rough waves and although I waited for quite a while I couldn't find it back. But I was very happy that I have seen this amazing animal in its element, swimming about in the waves and between the rocks.

Putre



Species list

- | | |
|-----------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 1. Southern viscacha | <i>Lagidium viscacia</i> |
| 2. Vicugna | <i>Vicugna vicugna</i> |
| 3. Highland tuco-tuco | <i>Ctenomys opimus</i> |
| 4. Bolivian Big-eared mouse | <i>Auliscomys boliviensis</i> |
| 5. Mouse sp. | <i>Cricetidae</i> |
| Alpaca ¹ | <i>Vicugna pacus</i> |

¹ Domestic species

What to do

- Visiting Putre Area
- Visiting Parque Lauca
- Visiting Reserva natural de las Vicunas



How to get there

Getting to Putre and staying for some night drives requires a rental of a car in Arica. If you only want to see the Mountain viscacha and Vicuñas you can also just take a day trip from Arica with a tour agency. In my case the rental did not allow me to get a normal car, I needed to get a 4x4 if I wanted to drive it off the main road from NP Lauca to NP las Vicunas. This was possibly due to the bad weather conditions. Another problem is that you don't have any gas stations after you leave Arica. First you need to find some of the right jerry cans (you're only allowed to use certain colored jerry cans for fuel). For me it took some time to find the right jerry cans. So if you want to go to Putre (which is worth it) you should take some time for preparation.



Drenched viscacha & vicunas

Travel log

During this part of my travels I had a lot of bad luck because there were very bad rainfalls during and before I arrived in Putre. The first day I arrived in Putre I walked around the town up the valley to the north east without seeing any mammals but it was good to take some time to adjust to the height. After the first day I went to the national parks for the next 3 days. I always followed the road up to the A 147 which is an older road that goes east from Putre. Along this road seems to be the best



place to search for Taruc in Chile. Sadly enough the weather was often misty and the visibility was very bad. The last day when I still had not seen the Taruc I just drove up and down the road twice and did a walk along the southern part of Putre to see if I could find these beautiful deer. Sadly enough I didn't find them. Once arrived in the national park Lauca I wanted to go to Las Vicunas to search for Andean mountain cats. Sadly enough after a few hours of driving and passing through 2 riverbeds, I arrived at a place where I could not cross anymore. The only car that passed was one from the CONAF that had an air snorkel to prevent the engine from drowning if the water got too high. It might have been possible to pass this crossing but I did not want to take the risk on my own, without traffic on the road and no one living close by. So sadly enough my chances of seeing an Andean mountain cat dropped. The 2 days that I spend in Lauca after this were still amazing. I tried to find wild cats or other mammals during the nights around Parinacota. There was a big population of **Mountain Viscachas** there and I saw 3 mice around here as well. During the day I also saw a mouse I am quite sure was a **Bolivian Big-eared mouse**. One night I drove along ruta a-181 a lot (sometimes doing a round trip via a93 back to 11 and again going to the a-181. Another night I walked from the farm that is east of Parinacota and on the a-93 to the east. There is a small community of **highland tuco-tuco** here of which I only got to see a gimp before it went off into its burrow. I just made my own way over the boulders and found some Viscachas although less than along the A-181. Sadly enough both nights it rained quite a lot and no cats were seen. A last place to look for the cats are the Termas de Las Cuevas at the park entrance. Here are quite some **Mountain Viscachas**. I have no clue if there are any sightings of cats around this area but there are at least quite some prey animals. At all these locations you can get a great look of the **Mountain Viscachas** also during the day when they are lazing about. Throughout the park there are also loads of herds of **Vicunas**. Most of my visits there were some groups around Termas de Las Cuevas. I find them amazing to watch and a bit more elegant and slender than their relatives the guanaco.

External source

I thought I mention again that it seems some local sales woman used to feed the mice at their stall just before you go into Putre. [Jon Hall \(2018\)](#) said that in between 9-11 in the morning would be the best time to check. This is the location: [-18.207412, -69.558586](#). Sadly I did not find the time to check by as I took a last effort to find the Taruc.

Santiago



Species list

- | | |
|------------------------------------|---------------------------|
| 1. Coruro | <i>Spalacopus cyanus</i> |
| 2. Culpeo | <i>Lycalopex culpaeus</i> |
| 3. Bennett's Chinchilla rat | <i>Abrocoma bennettii</i> |
- Viscacha

What to do

- Visiting mountainside Santiago

Travel log

Visiting the mountains of Santiago

In the mountains next to Santiago there are a few mammal species to search. I went to Reserva Yerba loca a few days. In this park just behind the camping there is an old pasture field with loads of **Coruro** burrows. A lot of them abandoned but one showed signs of recent digging. I stayed there a few times to finally see this little critter. After waiting around the burrows I saw one very briefly. I don't know why I had such a hard time seeing these critters. There are quite a few observations of these animals in the same period during the day and their burrows were not rare as I found a few more locations with burrows. I observed the burrows during twilight, dusk and scanned them

at night as well. I neither found mention of them in other travel reports. For me they're still a bit of a mystery and how to observe them.

Within reserva Yerba Loca I also observed a **Benett's Chinchilla rat** along the trail. I could observe it clearly for a few seconds between some shrubs. After it heard me it promptly ran to his hideout where I couldn't find it anymore. Luckily it needed to cross the path to get to its shelter so I could get some nice views. By all the paw prints I found in the surrounding, it remains quite often close to the hideout.

The **Culpeos** in the mountain area of Santiago could be observed around the same area regularly and probably get some left overs sometimes. They normally can be found around the parking lot after all the steep S bends ([-33.348631, -70.353614](#)). One of the nights being up on the mountains I also tried to find the **Culpeos** on a different spot where there should be **Mountain viscacha's** as well. I saw loads of tunnels of the culpeos but again not a live specimen. Also the viscachas didn't show themselves. Neither during the afternoon nor at night after sunset ([-33.343645, -70.300172](#)).

Additional species information

Monito del Monte

This was one of the species I really wanted to see. But during my preparation there was no information on places where to see them reliably. Parque Tantauco does not seem very reliable or productive but if you want to see this species parque nacional Tolhuaca and Petrohué seem very productive see the trip report of [Jono Dashper \(2019\)](#). And if you cannot go to these places but want to try in Chiloé check Inaturalist it looks like there are quite a lot of observations in the extreme north east of the island.

Kodkod

This species seems always a bit of a lucky chance. [Jono Dashper \(2019\)](#) had one in Petrohué. Otherwise read [Lennart Verheuevel \(2019\)](#) he has a great summary on loads of information on this species. Sadly I did not see this report when I went to Chile possibly it wasn't published yet.

Appendix

Appendix 1

PUNTA DE CHOROS
EMPRESA DE TRANSPORTES
PUBLICO Y PRIVADO DE PASAJEROS
Hector Moyano Galleguillos
LA SERENA PUNTA DE CHOROS Y CALETA CHARARAL

TARIFA RURAL
AÑO 2018

FONOS: 989703499 / 997170122 / 51-2-253206/959665380

ESTABLÉZCANSE las siguientes condiciones de operación que el servicio deberá cumplir:

| | |
|-----------------------------|---|
| FOLIO | 500216 |
| TIPO DE SERVICIO | RURAL |
| TIPO DE VEHICULOS | BUSES |
| RESPONSABLE DEL SERVICIO | HECTOR GABRIEL MOYANO GALLEGUILLOS RUT.: N° 7.007.985 - 2 DIRECCIÓN EL MESIAS N° 4042, VILLA EL PARQUE LA SERENA TELEFONOS: 512-253206 - 989703499 |
| ORIGEN DEL CIRCUITO | PROLONGACIÓN CALLE EDUARDO DE LA BARRA, COSTADO PARQUE JAPONÉS, LA SERENA |
| RECINTO DE ORIGEN - DESTINO | SERVICIO EN CIRCUVALACIÓN EN LA VIA PUBLICA DE LA LOCALIDAD DE PUNTA DE CHOROS Y OTRAS LOCALIDADES INTERMEDIAS. |

| TARIFAS | DESTINO | VALOR GENERAL | TARIFA ADULTO MAYOR |
|-----------------------------|------------------|---------------|---------------------|
| LA SERENA A: | PUNTA DE CHOROS | \$ 4.500 | \$ 3.000 |
| | LOS CHOROS | \$ 4.000 | \$ 3.000 |
| | EL RODADO | \$ 2.500 | \$ 2.000 |
| | LA HIGUERA | \$ 2.400 | \$ 1.500 |
| | CRUCE EL TOFO | \$ 2.200 | \$ 1.500 |
| | CRUCE LA HIGUERA | \$ 2.200 | \$ 1.500 |
| | CRUCE CHUNGUNGO | \$ 1.500 | \$ 1.000 |
| | CALETA DE HORNS | \$ 1.500 | \$ 1.000 |
| | EL ARRAYAN | \$ 1.000 | \$ 800 |
| EL RODADO | PUNTA DE CHOROS | \$ 2.500 | \$ 2.000 |
| EL RODADO | LOS CHOROS | \$ 1.500 | \$ 1.000 |
| CRUCE LA HIGUERA | LOS CHOROS | \$ 2.000 | \$ 1.500 |
| CRUCE LA HIGUERA | PUNTA DE CHOROS | \$ 3.000 | \$ 2.000 |