

## Tour Report Chile's Rare Mammals 27 February – 11 March 2024

Pudu deer



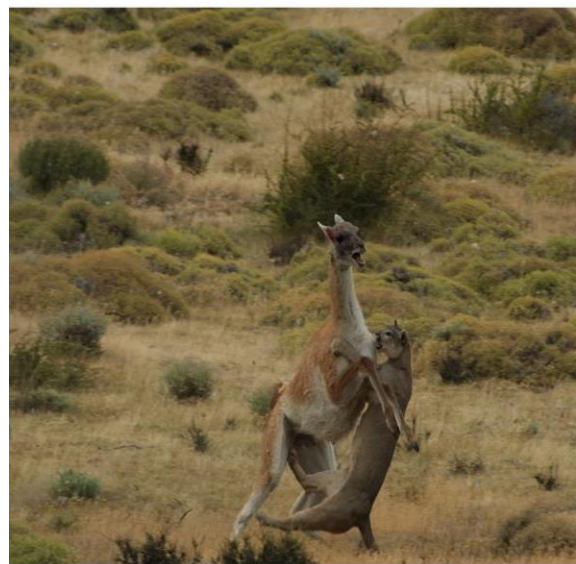
Southern river otter



Chilean dolphin



Puma



Compiled by Jurgen Schulmeister

**Friday 28 February 2025**

**Day 1:**

Chiloé Island- Crossing Chacao Channel and navigating around Queilen Península

*Partly cloudy with rain showers in the afternoon*

We set off early in the morning, heading towards Chiloé Island. During the ferry crossing, we were fortunate to observe several seabirds, and we spotted a small group of Southern sea lions.

We had lunch in Castro and then proceeded to the town of Queilen, where we embarked on a boat trip in search of coastal dolphins and other bird species in the area. That afternoon, we were able to spot several Peale's dolphins (southern dolphins) and, although more elusive, a few Chilean dolphins also made an appearance.

We concluded the trip with a stop at Islote Conejo, where we observed a small colony of Magellanic penguins, with a few Humboldt penguins among them. We finished the day by returning to Lodge Tepuhueico for the night.

**Saturday 1 March 2025**

**Day 2:**

Tepuhueico Lodge- Exploring the temperate rain forest

*Partly cloudy, with intermittent rain and gusts of wind during the night*

We started early in the morning with a trail walk along the Río Bravo, searching for forest and aquatic mammals and birds. The highlights included spotting a ringed kingfisher and two pudu deer, the latter of which quickly crossed the trail while running.

After lunch and a mid-afternoon break, we set out again. This time, we managed to spot a Magellanic woodpecker, and later had a very good encounter with a male pudu, which allowed us to observe it closely for several minutes.

Following dinner, we embarked on a productive night excursion. During this outing, we encountered a band-winged nightjar, Rufous-legged Owl, several Pudu deer, and even a glimpse of a colocolo opossum. We only saw the reflection of its eyes before it quickly fled into the bamboo thicket.

**Sunday 2 March 2025**

**Day 3:**

Tepuhueico Lodge-Walking across Gunnera Forest

*Rainy and stormy, with breaks of sunshine during the morning*

We started a little later than usual, allowing for some rest after the previous night's excursion. We caught the perfect window of good weather to explore a different ecosystem, characterised by large gunneras. While we didn't encounter any mammals on this trail, we were able to spot many birds typical of the temperate rainforest, including all the rhynchocryptids present, such as tapaculos and huet huet.

Additionally, we observed three Austral pygmy owls and Chilean flickers. The guests really enjoyed their last morning in the park. After lunch, we travelled to the next hotel, Quilquico. Due to the ongoing rain, no further activities were planned, so the afternoon was used for rest, and we had dinner at the hotel.

**Monday 3 March 2025**

**Day 4:**

Chepu River – Searching for southern river otters

*Windy but warm and sunny*

We woke up early and made our way to the Río Chepu, where our boat was waiting for us. We spent around three and a half hours navigating, and after a thorough search, we were fortunate enough to spot two river otters. One of them came very close, and we were able to see it eating on a log. Along the way, we observed many wetland birds, including herons, ducks, coots, and grebes.

The tour concluded with a lovely dinner at the home of the boat owners, a local restaurant with a beautiful view of the Río Chepu. The guests truly appreciated this day, not only for the chance to spot wildlife and stunning landscapes but also for the opportunity to connect with the local people.

After lunch, we visited the town of Dalcahue, known for its handicrafts and churches. We enjoyed walking along the waterfront and sharing stories about the traditional culture of the area. We returned to the hotel and ended the day with a delightful dinner while admiring the sunny, clear view of the Rilán Peninsula.

It is worth mentioning that this day's itinerary was adjusted due to rough seas in the Pacific, which prevented us from going on the whale and penguin-watching trip as originally planned. In fact, the following day was also not suitable for this activity due to adverse weather conditions.

**Tuesday 4 March 2025**

**Day 5:**

North East Coast Of Chiolé – Exploring the Quemchi coast and its beauty

*Rainy with breaks of sunshine during the day*

Due to waves exceeding 3.5 metres, as reported by the captain, it was not possible to carry out the planned navigation in Puñihuil. As a result, we had to improvise a Plan B. The morning was very rainy, so we decided to leave the hotel at 10 am, allowing the guests some extra time to rest.

We explored an alternative route, visiting a small park with a beautiful waterfall before heading to Quemchi, a fishing village on the east coast of the island. Here, we were able to spot Southern sea lions feeding in a group. The encounter was incredible, as after a while, a group of Chilean dolphins joined in, passing very close to the shore.

The guests really enjoyed this location, and we had dinner at a very authentic local restaurant. From there, we made our way to the city of Puerto Varas, arriving around dinner time to finish the day.

It is worth mentioning that the guests were very flexible with the changes and were understanding of the challenging weather conditions we were navigating.

**Wednesday 5 March 2025**

**Day 6:**

Boat trip along maullin river and flight to Southern Patagonia

*Overcast, windy, and cold*

We set off early from Puerto Varas to meet the boat captain. We navigated towards the mouth of the Río Maullín, on the Pacific coast, where we witnessed the strong waves still present from the poor weather of the previous days. However, we were able to observe a pod of Chilean dolphins up close for quite some time, along with a pair of Australis dolphins.

We also explored the sandbanks in search of shorebirds, witnessing large flocks of Black skimmers, Chilean

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flamingos, Hudsonian godwits, among others. After that, we stopped by a café for lunch before catching our flight to Punta Arenas.

That evening, we enjoyed a great meal at a local restaurant in the city, taking the guests outside the hotel to give them a taste of what this city at the southern tip of the American continent is like. The passengers were very happy by the end of the day and were excited for the next day's adventure to Tierra del Fuego and the king penguins.

**Thursday 6 March 2025**

**Day 7:**

Crossing the Strait of Magellan and visiting King Penguin Park

*Sunny with no wind – incredible weather*

We began the day by leaving the hotel early to catch the ferry that would take us to Tierra del Fuego. During the two-hour crossing, we were able to spot some pelagic birds, including Black-browed Albatross and Antarctic Giant Petrels. However, the highlight of the morning was spotting Sei whale blows on the horizon, and we were fortunate enough to observe a few individuals relatively close, allowing us to identify the species.

As we entered the Chiloé Bay, approaching Tierra del Fuego, we were warmly welcomed by a group of Peale's dolphins. After checking into the hotel and having a coffee, we headed towards Bahía Inútil in the King Penguin Park.

The visit to the park was fascinating, as the penguins were closer than usual. Some were still incubating their chicks under their feet, while others had older chicks. Additionally, we were able to spot a rare Snares penguin, which is not typically found in this area, but it was mingling with the rest of the king penguins.

The day continued with a drive back to the hotel, making stops in the Patagonian steppe to photograph Southern Caracaras and a few grey fox sightings. Finally, we enjoyed a lovely dinner at a local restaurant, reflecting on the day's experiences.

**Friday 7 March 2025**

**Day 8:**

Crossing Patagonian Steps towards Torres Del Paine National Park

*Heavy rain and wind during the morning*

We set off very early to cross the Primera Angostura Strait. Normally, this is where we can spot Commerson's dolphins, but due to the weather conditions, we were unable to go out onto the ferry's deck and therefore missed the opportunity to see them.

However, along the route, we made several stops to observe wildlife, including grey foxes and rheas. The highlight of the day was witnessing a group of more than 20 condors feeding on a dead sheep at a ranch by the roadside. Additionally, we saw black-chested buzzard eagles, both juveniles and adults, along with Southern caracaras.

After a long journey, we finally arrived at our hotel in Torres del Paine. We had dinner at the hotel that evening and retired to bed for a well-earned rest!

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**Saturday 8 March 2025**

**Day 9:**

Estancia Leona Amarga – Searching for the pumas

*Cold but clear and sunny*

We set off before dawn, hoping to catch the first light of the day in search of pumas. Despite our best efforts during the morning, we weren't able to spot any. We returned to the hotel for lunch, with hopes of better luck in the afternoon.

That afternoon, our tracker did an excellent job. After a couple of hours of searching, we finally found a female puma on the hunt. From about 20 metres away, we all witnessed an incredible moment that became the highlight of the trip: the female attempted more than ten times to strangle a guanaco, but unfortunately did not succeed. It was an unbelievable experience to watch.

We celebrated that evening with a dinner at the hotel, relieved and excited to have witnessed what was perhaps the most significant moment of the entire journey.

**Sunday 9 March 2025**

**Day 10:**

Full day at the park

*Sunny in the morning, rainy and windy in the afternoon*

We woke up early before dawn, aiming to capture some of the park's viewpoints with the best light and with no one else around. The morning was perfect for photography, and we had the park mostly to ourselves.

In the afternoon, we explored different areas of the park, searching for points of interest and some of the missing mammals on our list. Unfortunately, we were unable to find any skunks or armadillos. However, we were able to add new duck species to our birding list, and we had wonderful encounters with three different woodpeckers: the Magellanic woodpecker, the striped woodpecker, and the Chilean flicker.

For lunch, we dined at a different restaurant located in another part of the park. In the evening, we switched hotels for our last night, staying at Hotel Grey, where we enjoyed a lovely farewell dinner.

**Monday 10 March 2025**

**Day 11:**

Last morning in the park and going back to Puerto Natales and the airport

*Golden morning light in between rain showers*

On our final day, we woke up at dawn to catch the best light at Lago Grey. Although we didn't spot any new wildlife, it was an incredible experience to enjoy the Magellanic forest all to ourselves, with golden sunlight over the lake and distant icebergs. It was a fitting farewell to the region.

Afterwards, we headed toward Puerto Natales for our last lunch in the area. The passengers had time to shop for some souvenirs, and on the way, we were treated to sightings of eagles and condors, a perfect way to conclude the tour.

We arrived at the Holiday Inn for dinner in Santiago, where we officially closed the tour. The next day, we ensured that all the passengers were well taken care of and ready for their journey home as they departed from the airport.

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