

Argentina and Southern Chile Tour Report, November 1-15, 2010

Tour set up and led by Fiona Reid and Regina Ribeiro, with participants George Smiley, Joanna Langdale, Jerry Waters, Bill Voelker, Gwen Brewer, and George Jett

Photos by Fiona Reid, Regina Ribeiro and Alfredo Gaztambide (our illustrious driver in Chile)

Tour Itinerary

Nov 2. Morning flights arrived in Buenos Aires. We had an afternoon trip to Costanera Sur (large city park on harbor). We saw a good variety of birds but missed the Coypu that are sometimes seen here. Some bird highlights included Fulvous Whistling Duck, Spot-flanked Gallinule with young, Narrow-billed Woodcreepers near nest hole, Masked Yellowthroat, and Baywing. Our local guide, Lucas Marti was very helpful and knew the birds. Overnight at Hotel Lafayette

Nov 3. Morning flight to Posadas via Corrientes. Bus trip to San Juan Poriahú, a large estancia 12 km NE of Loreto, on west side of Iberá Marshes. In the afternoon we visited an ibis and spoonbill roost at the estancia entrance. At dusk huge flocks of Bare-faced Ibis arrived, filling the sky. Later we had a night drive and walk. The estancia grounds are home to Tropical Screech and Barn Owls, and we also saw a small *Liophis* snake and a Giant Toad. On the night drive we saw several Marsh Deer, Chilla Fox, and glimpsed a Neotropical River Otter, as well as numerous caiman and Capybaras. Host: Marcos Rams, the owner, and Carlos, local guide/driver. We spent 3 nights at this estancia.



Capybara with young

Nov 4. Our morning boat trip on small lake on estancia property was good for birds, including Least Bittern and Azure Gallinule. We saw a Black-chested Buzzard-Eagle at its nest near the lake and also spotted the two caiman species sunning. We caught two species of Piranha in the lake. Afternoon visit to grassland and forest patch for Black and Gold Howlers. The forest was littered with armadillo burrows but we didn't see any animals emerge, due to dry conditions. Night walk near main estancia buildings.



Chilla Fox cub and the fate of a young Capybara

Nov 5. Early walk to ibis roost area, where we found a family of Chilla fox and watched young playing and eating a baby Capybara. After breakfast we drove to a large marsh at north end of Iberá region in search of Saffron-cowled Blackbird and others (Jabiru nest en route). Here we had great views of Green-barred Woodpecker, nesting Greater Thornbird, and Chestnut-capped Blackbird. We visited the sleepy little town of Loreto on way back. Between Loreto and San Juan Poriahú we saw a lone female howler in a small tree in open habitat. She hid on our approach. We had an afternoon outing to different grassland habitat where we saw the Strange-tailed Tyrant. Late evening we returned to the fox den and saw the parents moving their prey. Night walk around property with views of the owls but no new mammals.

Nov 6. Early departure to Posadas airport and return flight to BA. The flight was delayed and departed later than the original schedule. Afternoon trip to Otamendi was unproductive (problematic due to late arrival, bus breakdown and very busy, dusty roads on Saturday afternoon). Steak dinner in BA and overnight at Lafayette hotel.

Nov 7. Morning flight to Trelew. Pickup by local guide, Jorge, and visit to sewage ponds with numerous water birds (and trash) outside Trelew. Highlights included Chilean Flamingos, Great and Silvery Grebes, Coscoroba Swan, many species of ducks, and Peregrine Falcon. Lunch in Puerto Madryn. Took coast road via El Doradillo and made a visit to Southern Sea Lion colony at

Punta Loma. Here we also had excellent views of Cuis, a small cavy, and breeding Rock Shags. We continued on to Puerto Pirámides for 2 nights, with our first views of Right Whales in the gulf. Night walk at Pirámides.



Southern Sea Lion sprawled

Nov 8. Morning trip to southern part of Valdés Peninsula with views of Red-backed Hawk, Mara, and Guanacos en route, and visit to Elephant Seal rookery at Punta Delgada. Watched Guanacos and Maras en route. Afternoon boat trip in Golfo Nuevo to see Southern Right Whales, with excellent close views of mothers and calves. Late afternoon visit to Sea Lion rookery at Punta Pirámides, with Snowy Sheathbill and other water birds present. Night walk at Pirámides with a few spiders and a sphinx moth as highlights.



Chilla in the wind



Southern Right Whale

Nov 9. Visit to Punta Cantor and Caleta Valdés for Elephant Seals, then north to Punta Norte, exploring central and northern parts of the peninsula. A Larger Hairy Armadillo put on a great show for us. In the afternoon we drove south to Gaiman with a stop at Isla de los Pájaros en route. We stayed 2 nights at the lovely Los Mimbres, a chacra on the edge of Gaiman.



Larger Hairy Armadillo

Nov 10. We drove to Playa Union and took a boat trip to see Commerson's Dolphin. The dolphins were very active, bowriding and jumping. A few Southern Sea Lions were seen at the harbor. We had a picnic lunch at an Elephant Seal rookery at Isla Escondida en route via the gravel road to Punta Tombo. Visit to penguin colony at Punta Tombo, where we got very close looks at Elegant Crested Tinamou, Darwin's Rhea and Guanacos, as well as the ½ million Magellanic Penguins. Night walk back at Los Mimbres yielded many European Hares but no other mammals.



Young male Southern Elephant Seal



Magellanic Penguin after a long day

Nov 11. Transfer to Trelew and flight to El Calafate. Late morning we departed for Perito Moreno Glacier in Los Glaciares NP, with a picnic lunch en route. On the way out of El Calafate we stopped at a wetland where waders and ducks were seen, as well as our first Upland and Ashy-headed Geese. In addition to the spectacular glacier we saw a good range of birds including Fire-eyed Diucon, Austral Negrito, and Austral Parakeets. On our way back to town we had excellent views of Andean Condors, including one bird hopping along the ground. We stayed overnight at the very nice Hotel Campo Kau Yatun in El Calafate.



Humboldt's Hog-nosed Skunk

Nov 12. Drove to Torres del Paine with stops for wildlife. We arrived at the Chilean border at noon, but had a long delay crossing. We met José, our puma tracker guide, at Chilean side of border. Our afternoon included exploration of Lago Sarmiento region of Torres. Jose showed us the den of Chilla fox, where we listened to the cubs crying when Jose imitated their mother. We could not see the young, but the noise was impressive. Both parents were seen. In the evening we transferred vehicles at Laguna Amarga Portería to cross a very narrow bridge. While waiting for our van we were entertained by a Humboldt's Hog-nosed Skunk. We had dinner at Las Torres, where we checked in for a 3-night stay.



Southern Huemul



Culpeo or Red Fox

Nov 13. Very early start in search of Pumas and other wildlife. Visit to Lago Sarmiento Mirador del Lago Nordenskjold, and Salto Grande at Lago Pehoé. Picnic lunch at Lago Grey. On the way back, Regina spotted a Huemul at Salto Chico, Rio Paine, near the camping area of Lago Pehoe and we were able to approach very closely. We also saw our first Culpeo hunting in an open area. José located 3 Pumas in mid afternoon on conglomerate rock behind Laguna Amarga, which we watched for an hour or more, resting among large boulders by a cliff-edge. On return to Las Torres we went out after dinner to inspect the dead horse above lodge, but there was no evidence of recent Puma activity.



A Puma on the move



Two Pumas resting amongst conglomerate rock boulders

Nov 14. Four of group hiked up trail toward Torres. A Coypu was seen by some of the group. Others walked with José to forest and streams around our hotel. We had great views of Chilean Flicker, Thorn-tailed Rayadito and other birds. We stopped to visit the dead horse and noticed Puma activity since our evening visit. Lunch at the hotel. Our afternoon outing was to Laguna Azul, with a stop at Cascada Paine. We took a walk in forest which had suffered from a fire, and saw Austral Pygmy Owl and the small Gray Four-eyed Frog. On return we saw a Piche Armadillo in Estancia Goic, between Laguna Azul and Laguna Amarga, and later we stopped to check on Puma site from previous day (but they were absent). On return to hotel at about 7:30 p.m. we paid another visit to the dead horse. One puma was glimpsed walking into the brush, but there was too much disturbance from over-zealous NG photographers and noisy hotel staff.



Pumas feeding on a dead horse

Nov 15. We had an early breakfast and departure. Fiona walked up to the dead horse and saw 3 Pumas feeding, a mother and two almost-grown young. We left early and drove back to El Calafate – being first to cross border we had no trouble there, but we needed the extra time at the airport as the flight boarded an hour before scheduled departure. We returned to BA and awaited our international flights home.



Our group at Torres del Paine