

**Bird & Mammal Trip Report Patagonia
- Chile & Argentina (Dec-Jan 2021/2022)**



Rob Jansen
photography

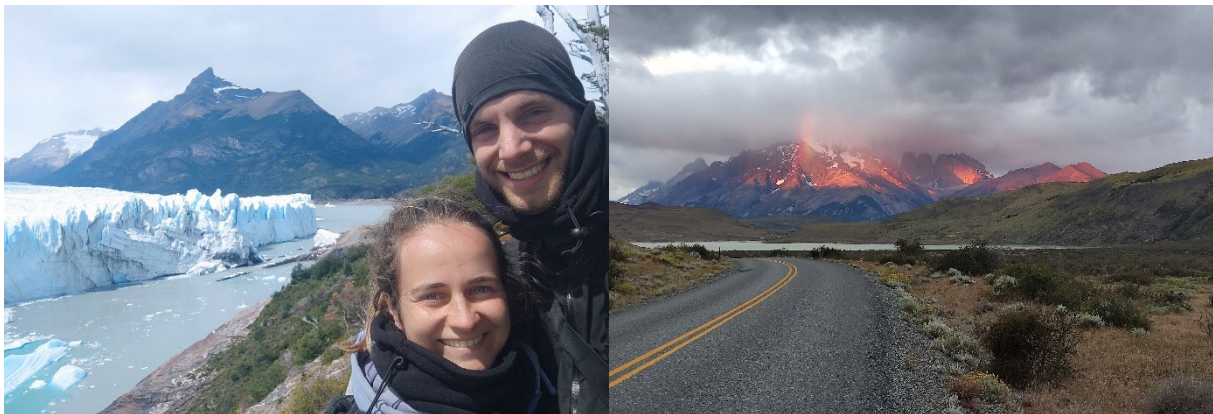
Introduction

About us

We are two enthusiastic nature lovers who travel the world together to search for stunning birds, fascinating mammals and incredible nature. Our world travel started in October 2021 in Chile, where we bought a car to drive through South-America in search of birds and mammals for about 2 years.

Rob Jansen is biologist and wildlife photographer, and thus has a lot of knowledge about species and ecology. He is enthusiastic about all that's in nature, but mainly photographs birds and mammals.

Romy Jansen-Houtzager is a marketing professional. The marketing behind our social media accounts, the look and feel of this report and the website are her work. In the field, she is an excellent spotter and very patient (give me some of her patience ...and hurry!).



Rob and Romy at the Perito Moreno Glacier in Argentina (left) and the Y-156 road towards Torres del Paine NP

Information and how to use this trip report

This trip report covers the region of Patagonia, from Chaitén all the way south to Tierra del Fuego. For all photos of our Patagonian – Chile & Argentina trip, comments, compliments, any specific questions, visit and/or contact us via our website.

🌐 www.robjansenphotography.com/chile

🌐 www.robjansenphotography.com/argentina

📷 www.instagram.com/robjansenphotography

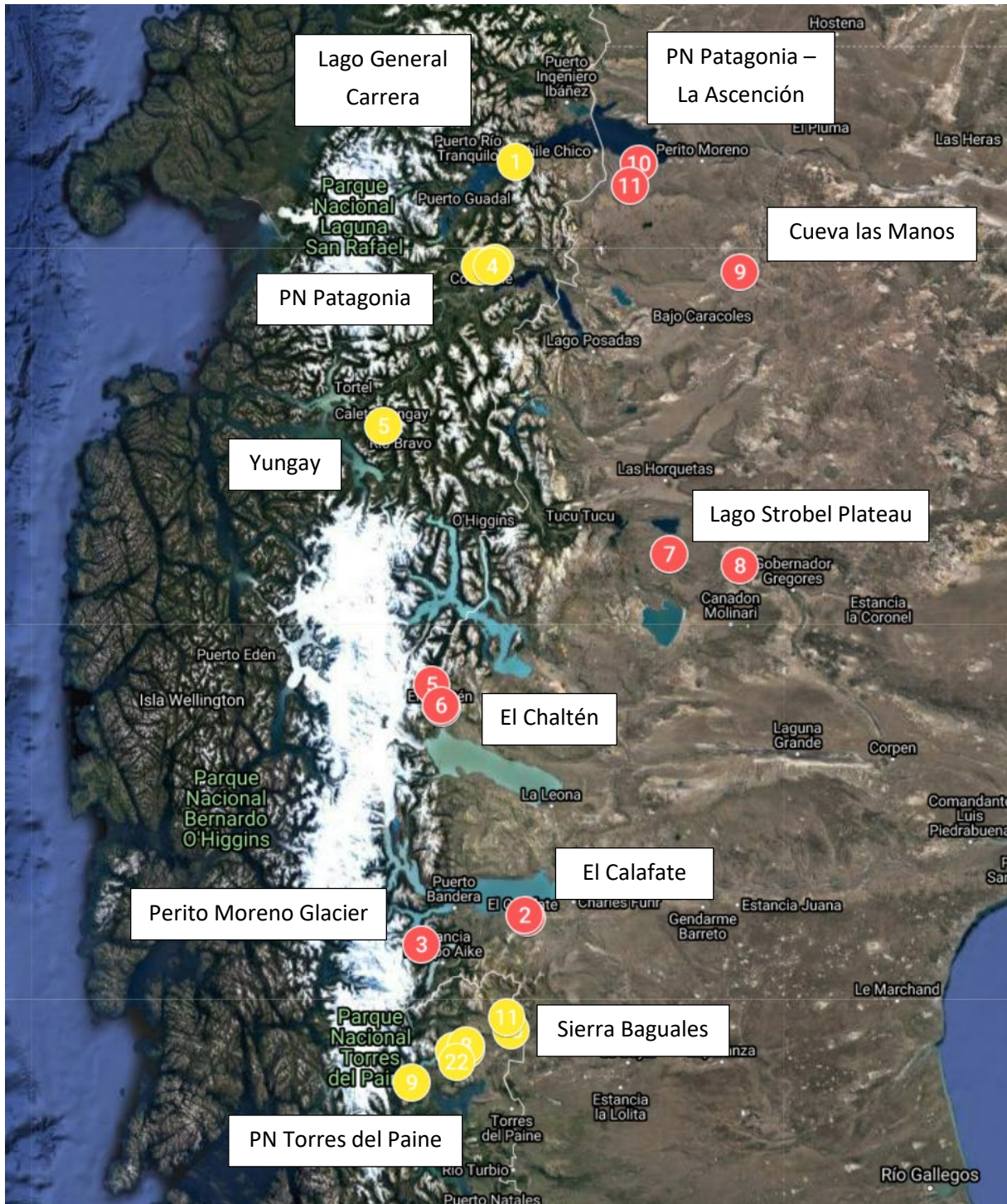
Species are highlighted in this trip report: **blue for birds**, **red for mammals** and **green for herpetofauna**. Target species which we missed on a specific spot are written in *italic*. This gives you an idea which species to pay extra attention to. All observations made by us in Patagonia can be found on Observation.org. We observed a total of 105 bird species and 10 mammal species (plus 3 introduced species) in Patagonia – Chile & Argentina. Click here for the: [total bird list](#), [total mammal list](#) or [the total species list](#).

For more trip reports see our website: <https://www.robjansenphotography.com/trip-reports>

Map and specific locations

After arranging our car in Santiago, we drove south. Therefore we start this trip report south of where we ended our Southern Chile Trip report, from Chaitén further south towards what is best known as Patagonia. In the table below you can find the order in which we presented this trip report. The first part towards Lago General Carrera is obviously skipped if you start in Punta Arenas or Puerto Natales. If you are driving south like we did, you can choose how to drive south; through Chile or Argentina (once the borders open again). Most people will visit the south (see part 3), and might go north and visit (some) places of part 2 in Argentina. If you have a lot of time you can do a loop, visiting all these places, crossing the border at Lago General Carrera (Chilean name)/Lago Buenos Aires (Argentinean name).

PLACE	RECOMMENDED DAYS	QUICK/SHORT ON TIME
RUTA 7, DRIVING CHAITEN TOWARDS AND VISITING LAGO GENERAL CARRERA (CHILE)	2	2
1. SOUTH THROUGH CHILE		
PN PATAGONIA (CHILE)	2	1
FERRY YUNGAY – PUERTO NATALES (CHILE)	3	3
2. SOUTH THROUGH ARGENTINA		
MESETA BUENOS AIRES (ARGENTINA)	3	2
CUEVA LAS MANOS (ARGENTINA)	1	-
LAGUNA STROBEL (ARGENTINA)	-	-
CHALTÉN (ARGENTINA)	2,5	1,5-2
MORENO GLACIER (ARGENTINA)	2	1-1,5
3. THE SOUTH		
TORRES DEL PAINE (CHILE)	3-5	2-3
SIERRA BAGUALES (CHILE)	1	-
Y-405 (CHILE)	1-2	1
CUEVA LA LEONA (CHILE)	1	0,5 (evening)
LAGUNA LOS PALOS (CHILE)	Quick stop	Quick stop
PUNTA ARENAS/RUTA 9 (CHILE)	0,5	-
Y-535 (CHILE)	1	-
PUNTA DELGADA FERRY (CHILE)	Quick stop	0,5 (Quick stop)
LAGUNA LOS CISNES (CHILE)	0,5	-
PARQUE PENGUÑO REY (CHILE)	0,5-1	0,5
USHUAIA (ARGENTINA)	3-4?	?





We made a [map in Google My Maps](#) with pointers of interesting trails and places and specific bird and mammal locations. You can view this map, download the points and add them to your own map (click on the three dots above the legend and download the KML file and drag this to your own map), or add them in the app 'Maps.me'. Maps.me has almost all walking trails on it and you can use it offline. Route navigation by car doesn't always work great though and it's better to use google maps for that purpose.

Weather and timing

We visited Patagonia as part of our world travel from the 13th of December 2021 till the 15th of January 2022. The weather is different from central and southern Chile, as it was way more windy and way colder. Average days were windy, with 3-4 Bft in the mornings up to 5-6 Bft in the afternoons. We had plenty of days where wind gusts reached 7-8 Bft. The wind made it really cold and we had thermal clothing underneath our normal clothes to stay warm when going for longer walks. A buff, hat and gloves were worn often! Nights were sometimes as cold as 0 degrees Celsius (or below!). We certainly

hope you encounter better weather conditions, but be prepared for the worst and you will at least be warm;) Bird/mammal-wise the timing was good. Lots of young SA Grey Foxes and Guanacos, plovers still in breeding plumage. The King Penguins didn't have any young yet at the end of December though.

Transportation

Our transportation in this trip report was of course our Toyota 4Runner SR5 4.0 2010 (2x4) called 'Forrest'. We bought this car in Santiago and got it converted so that we could sleep in it as well. A car with high clearance isn't needed per se in Patagonia, and most places can easily be visited with a normal sedan. Ruta 7 from Chaitén to Tortel/Yungay is mostly a gravel road and some parts in bad condition, but they are working on it and it might get better in the near future. The Y-535 however can only be driven partly with a normal sedan.



Our loyal friend Forrest along the Y-405



Tent and awning attached to the 4Runner

Literature

We used the following books and apps:

- Birds of Chile, Helm Field Guides, 1st edition, 2021, Daniel Martínez Piña & Gonzalo Gonzáles Cifuentes. *The English version of the guide for birders in Chile. Drawings are good, especially the extra drawings of birds in flights and specific details. ID descriptions are not the best, as they don't always describe what you want to know. Also they don't mention the months of occurrence in Chile for migratory birds.*
- Birds of Argentina and the South-west Atlantic, Helm Field Guides, 1st edition, 2020, Mark Pearman & Juan I. Areta. *Drawings are ok, but for some species the details and proportions seem a bit off. But it's practically the only book for birders in Argentina. Searching up a bird (family) isn't made easy as the list in the beginning of the book is not alphabetically ordered. They do, however, pay extra attention to taxonomy and possible splits.*
- Mammals of the Southern Cone, Argentina, Chile, Paraguay, Uruguay, 2020, 1st edition, Lynx. *Happy that Lynx decided to make mammals guides. This book is small and easy to take along and has all the mammals in there! For naturalists who are interested in the bigger fauna (not being bats, mice etc) this guide should suffice during the travel.*
- REPTILES DEL CENTRO SUR DE CHILE. *Spanish digital guide, [available for free here](#).*

- Anfibios de los Bosques de la Zona Centro Sur y Patagonia de Chile Anfibios de los Bosques de la Zona Centro Sur y Patagonia de Chile. *Spanish digital guide, [available for free here](#).*
- Merlin app for the birds sound. *Just amazing that the app is free. We didn't miss any sounds.*
- BirdNet app for recording the bird sounds. If you don't know all the bird sounds, BirdNet can help you record the sound and give a possible ID. It helped us a few times when we were frustratingly searching for a bird we heard deep inside the shrubs and couldn't find. A sure ID of a more common bird from BirdNet saved us some time here and there ;)
- iOverlander app for camping places. This app gives nice information on where to camp or buy stuff.

Equipment

Photography: Sony A9 II + 200-600mm + 1.4x converter + Sony 24-105mm (Rob), GoPro Hero 9 (Romy)

Binoculars and telescope: Swarovski EL 8x32 WB, Eden 8x32 XP, Swarovski 65HD + 25-50mm

Heat scope/Thermal imager: Lahoux Spotter Elite 35V (lahouxbirding.com). A great heat scope from a company in The Netherlands. I owned other brands, but we are super happy with the sharpness, modes and light weight of this heat scope! More here: www.robjansenphotography.com/lahouxbirding

Spotlighting: Fenix HT18 Long Distance Flashlight (powerful, very focussed and my preferred choice for open areas), Fenix TK35 2018-edition (less powerful and focussed than the HT18, but still very strong and nice for spotlighting!), Fenix FD41 Focus Flashlight (comparable to the LedLenser), LedLenser P7R (can be focussed☺)

Use of cell phones in Chile

Due to a law here in Chile all cell phones have to be registered officially in order to function here. Sometimes they work without registration, but if you don't register within 30 days after arrival, it might get blocked as well. The whole idea probably is to prevent stolen phones to be used in Chile. Registration can already be done when you are home. We did it for free via this website: <https://service.dekra.cl/insc-admin/en/ex-paso01.html>. They need some info on your phone, and it takes about 1-2 days to register officially. We got an email that it was registered. Our phones could not automatically select a Chilean provider. We had to adjust the following settings: turn the international roaming on and select the only 3G mobile network. Then our provider in the Netherlands did a sim reset. This took 15 minutes while our phone was turned off and the sim was removed from our mobile. After that we turned on our phones and could select the mobile network 'Entel Network'.

A bit of a hassle, but nothing to worry if you do this back home already. A good local provider is WOM, and you can go to any WOM-store and ask for a 'chip' and they should give you one for free with already some Mb on it as well. They can help you activating it. Recharging can be done via the app with a credit card (Recargar -> Prepago) or at the counters of supermarkets and sometimes pharmacies as well. WOM mostly has unlimited usage of WhatsApp after you recharge it.

Cash / ATM's Chile

We have two different debit cards and two credit cards with us when we travel. As the debit cards are the cheapest to use (0,5% respectively 1,2% foreign transaction fee), we try those debit cards (Maestro) most of the time. Getting cash at an ATM gives the same transaction fees, so as long as the local bank doesn't charge us for the withdrawal, it's better to pay in cash than credit cards for us. The maximum amount of Chilean Pesos (CLP/\$) which can be obtained is 200.000\$ per withdrawal. We only found Scotia Bank to charge nothing for a withdrawal, with most other banks charging between 5.000-7.500\$ per withdrawal. It might differ depending on your own bank, but for us Scotia Bank saved us a lot of fees. When you are heading south from Puerto Montt, less ATMs are available. So be prepared and bring enough cash just in case.

Cash Argentina

Bring dollars/euros when visiting Argentina and be sure to look up the 'Blue Dollar' rates. As inflation rates are high in Argentina, currencies like dollars and euros are wanted to make sure savings don't go up in smoke. However, it's hard for Argentineans to get these currencies. The 'Blue Dollar' rates are way higher than the official exchange rates (double the amount as we write this). Western Union will exchange for the Blue Dollar rate and in bigger cities you can change money on street corners at guys shouting "Cambio!". Western Union will also give you the Blue Dollar rate when you transfer money to yourself and pick it up at the counter (we pay a €3,90 fee for this). Your money will bring you twice as far or you can spend twice as much (depending on your style). Check online if the 'Blue Dollar' still exists, as politics made it 'disappear' for a few years (it's back since 2019). Argentinean pesos are worth nothing if you want to change them back to your local currency (and not many places do this anyways) so be smart on how many Argentinean pesos you get and spend it all in Argentina ;).

19% TAX in Chile

There is a local law which states that Chileans and foreign people that live in Chile have to pay 19% tax (mostly at hotels). You don't have to pay this as a foreigner, as long as you pay in USD! So make sure they charge the hotel on your credit card in USD. Once you pay in CLP (cash or card) you are charged the 19% tax as well.

Water-to-Go

To reduce plastic usage on our travels we bought Water-to-Go water bottles. Read about our experience with Water-to-Go on our website: www.robjansenphotography.com/water-to-go. The bottle and filters are not too expensive, and you will have your investment back within one holiday. If you order with the voucher **RJANSEN15** you will get **15% discount** as well! Check the website here: www.watertogousa.com (United States of America, Canada), www.watertogo.eu (United Kingdom) or www.watertogo.shop (most countries in the EU)

Visited sites (south from Chaitén)

Ruta 7 - Chile

We arrived the 14th of December in Chaitén by ferry. From there we headed south towards Lago General Carrera (around 650 kms). On our way, we saw beautiful landscapes with high mountains and colourful lakes. Because we wanted to have more time in the south, we stopped only to overnight somewhere in between. But if you have more time, these Valdivian Forests might be a good option to spotlight in search for *Southern Pudu*, *Kodkod* and maybe *Darwin's Fox* as well. Further south (near Cerro Castillo) you might have a chance for *South Andean Huemul*. Cochrane village is promoted as being the Huemul centre, and there are signs in the cities' park and streets named after this animal. The best chance here seems to go to Reserva Nacional Tamango, as people seem to see quite a few Huemuls while hiking there. We spotlighted Ruta 7 from Cochrane for 30km going south, but saw nothing. We did however find fresh deer tracks next to our car the next morning! The closer you get to Yungay/Tortel the more signs warn you for crossing deer and even signs that warn for Huemuls on the road. Spotlighting the last 10-20km before Yungay may give you the best chance for this species.



Views along Ruta 7



Views along Ruta 7

1. South through Chile

Lago General Carrera - Chile

[-46.59429, -72.3323](#)

Our main target here was the *Wolffsohn's Viscacha*, of which there were some sightings on iNaturalist. We arrived in the afternoon but couldn't find any Viscachas (probably due to the high temperature). We decided to stay for the night and try to search with our Lahoux heat scope at night and in the early morning. It was only the next morning that Rob found one very distant *Wolffsohn's Viscacha* sunbathing on one of the rocks around 09.50 with the scope. We thought and hoped that the hillsides would be like Spanish beaches, and that they would be crowded within minutes... but nothing like that. The one Viscacha stayed there for about 50 minutes before it disappeared back in the crevice. We

searched some different spots where it had been reported, but couldn't find any other individuals. We talked to a local shop owner, and she knew about the animal and said they could be seen crossing the road further to the east, but she couldn't give a more precise location. The Argentinian side seems to be far better for this species, but due to Covid we were not able to follow our planned route and cross to the east.



Camping at Lago General Carrera

Wolffsohn's Viscacha record shot

PN Patagonia - Chile

[-47.11701, -72.48498](#)

Visited date: 16-17 December 2021

Accommodation: We stayed in the NP on the parking lot of the trail 'Sendero Lagunas Altas'. There are several campings in the park with showers and water taps. There is an entrance fee (8000 pesos p.p.) and a camping fee (8000 pesos p.p.), but we didn't see any rangers and weren't charged either fee.

Ruta X-83

[-47.13032, -72.60246](#)

When you enter the NP from Ruta 7, you can drive 11 kms before you arrive at the CONAF entrance. During these kms we saw many **Guanacos** with cute youngsters standing in the fields next to the road. It is a nice road to drive because of the beautiful landscapes with high mountains and low green vegetation. When you pass the CONAF entrance, you can drive further and you pass multiple lakes next to the road. **Chilean Flamingo** is sometimes spotted in one of the saltier lakes, but the lake was all dried up when we were there. There is a lake with a picnic area where we found some birds like **Great Grebe** and **White-tufted Grebe**. **Guanacos** are abundant, and you would expect **Puma** to be as well. We heard that Puma had been sighted 2 times between the camping area 'Westwind' and the CONAF offices in the few days before we were there. Looking back on this (after NP Torres del Paine) we think chances of seeing Pumas should be quite high when getting out of bed at 05.00 and driving the park roads. Long after we visited this park we heard that the road south of Ruta X-83 towards Laguna la Pepa in this park is good for **Huemul** as well.

Sendero Lagunas Altas

[-47.13021, -72.50464](#)

We walked this 21km long trail with a total of 1268 metres ascend from 07.20 in the morning. The sun was already up. The hike has some nice views, but we didn't see any wildlife besides some **Ashy-headed Geese**. The forests you pass through seems like good habitat for **South Andean Huemul**, but we only found droppings that we suspects to be from a Huemul. We recommend spending your time down in the valley, or do a hike in Reserva Nacional Tamango for a better chance for Huemuls.



Guanacos

Guanaco

Yungay-Puerto Natales - Chile

[-47.93489, -73.32402](#)

Visited dates: 18 -20 December 2021

Accommodation: The boat has comfortable chairs where you can sleep in. We were able to sleep in our car though, and they will give you a flat spot on the boat if you ask them.

General Information: We paid 42.820 CLP for Rob (he paid the resident fee because of his Chilean RUT, which he needed for buying the car) and 128.450 CLP for Romy (foreigner fee). For Forrest we paid 60.400 CLP (Chilean fee as well, double the price per meter for foreigners).

The boat can be booked online, and is the only way to get to Patagonia by car during Covid when the borders are closed. It's a bit expensive, but it's a great alternative for driving the Patagonian flats for hours. The views of the fjords are amazing, but you have to be lucky with the weather, as rain, fog and big waves are common. You can see the Southern Patagonian Ice Fields and if you're lucky you can see icebergs with southwestern wind in Canal Wide. The best place for cetaceans is the part before Puerto Eden according to the crew. We didn't see any there, but we did see many **South American Sea Lions**. **Marine Otters** are seen by locals from Puerto Eden, and they apparently even go underneath the docks. You probably need to have totally flat waters to be able to spot any, or you have to stay for a week in Puerto Eden. We passed Canal Wide the second night and saw 100s of **Black-browed Albatrosses**, multiple **Southern Giant Petrel**, a few **Chilean Skuas** and **Magellanic Diving-petrels**. The next morning we were passing Canal Garcia Domínguez (an area of fairly open sea closest to the open ocean) and saw many **Storm-petrels**, amongst which 1 **Pincoya Storm-petrel**, and some possible **Fuegian Storm-petrels** and **Wilson's Storm-petrels** (but it's uncertain if these are safely distinguished

in the field, see the article from in Dutch Birding¹)! There we also had **Peale's Dolphins** and more **South American Sea Lions**. The stronger winds and rain prevented us from being on the deck for a long time after Canal Garcia Domínguez. Black-Browed Albatrosses and Magellanic Diving-Petrels were seen occasionally from the dining area on our trip further south.



Ferry in between the fjords



Black-browed Albatross in front of the Ice Fields

2. South through Argentina

PN Pat. - La Ascensión – Arg. -46.60713, -71.40704

Visited dates: 15-16 January 2022

I'll keep it short as I will write a special about the Hooded Grebe to elaborate on all of this. You have to walk a hike (Sendero La Meseta, up till -46.71568, -71.47903), which takes about 2-3 days, or you have to hire a guide. Pablo Hernández (tobianoexpediciones@gmail.com or +54 9 2966 60-3552) is a guide who is from the region and can take you up the mountain by car and has a camp set up!

The hike up yielded some nice birds: **Patagonian Yellow-finch**, **Band-tailed Earthcreeper**, **Austral Canastero** and our first **Elegant Crested Tinamou**. No mammals besides **Guanaco**, but **Puma** is seen here sometimes. If you are very interested in Tuco-tucos; we saw lots of holes closes to each other on the trail just before Roca Guacha (about 4km from the park entrance), similar to the Tuco-tuco colony we had seen at Parque Penguino Rey. Not sure which species though

¹ Howell, S.N.G. and F. Schmitt, 2016. Pincoya Storm Petrel: comments on identification and plumage variation. Dutch Birding 38: 388-392



Hooded Grebe

Hooded Grebe

Cueva de las Manos – Arg.

[-47.15622, -70.65744](#)

Visited dates: 14 January 2022

We had seen quite some observations of the *Wolffsohn's Viscachas* (which we had seen from a great distance on the Chilean side) in the near area of Cueva de las Manos on iNaturalist. Unfortunately all those pointers along Rio Ecker turned out to be closed off with fences and gates (probably private property). As a back-up we tried to go to the caves, as Cueva de las Manos is a known place for *Wolffsohn's Viscacha*. We actually didn't visit the cuevas themselves, as the entrance fee was 2000 pesos per person and you would walk with a super big group, and on top of that the wind was strong and they hadn't seen the Viscachas that day yet. We weren't allowed to walk the trails in the canyon either as you needed special permission for that. We tried some good looking rocks in the direct surroundings, and a promising canyon nearby. Remember I said this species would be way easier on the Argentinean side? Unfortunately we couldn't find any Viscachas, so I am not so sure about this anymore. Better weather conditions might yield better results, as the habitat seems great.

A friend of us drove Ruta 41 (which is supposed to be very scenic!) and found 2 *Wolffsohn's Viscachas* on a rock directly south of Ruta 41 ([-47.19283, -71.80022](#)) and we read that more people found them along Ruta 41 (for example on the app iOverlander, not your typical mammal watchers).

Lago Strobel - Argentina

[-48.57753, -71.18569](#)

Visited dates: 11-12 January 2022

I'll keep it short here as well. Unless you have a guide and/or are willing to pay ridiculous amounts of money, don't go here! The *Hooded Grebes* are out of reach most of the season, except -depending on the snow- for the months October/November at the lagoon near Estancia de Angostura (famous for being a reliable place for the *Austral Rail*, at [-48.63452, -70.64906](#)). I will write a special about the Hooded Grebe to elaborate on all of this. We did see *Patagonian Yellow-Finch* and a dead *South-American Grey Fox* and a dead *Puma* (apparently these are legally hunted here by the cattle owners).

El Chaltén - Argentina

[-49.33164, -72.88673](#)

Visited dates: 9-11 January 2022

This town is super touristic, and that was not our thing! The landscapes here are luckily breath-taking, which was the only reason to stay longer. The first day we drove the gravel road after Chaltén. We wanted to do some forest birding at Estancia Los Huemuls ([-49.21916, -72.96064](#)), but unfortunately it was just about to close. We decided to do some birding along the road, which yielded **Magellanic Woodpecker** as the best species.

As the road was busy till late in the evening we decided to do some spotlighting early in the morning. We started driving from 05.30 and drove all the way to Lago del Desierto. Although there are many signs on the road warning for **Southern Huemuls** walking on it (like every 2km a sign!), we didn't encounter any. After we turned around and it became more light we did hear a **Magellanic Woodpecker** and to our surprise 3 **Black-throated Huet-huets** were walking on the roadside. Quite obliging, but as it was too dark the pictures didn't turn out well. We heard a distant calling **Magellanic Tapaculo** and saw 2 **Austral Parakeets** flying over our heads. Just before we reached the village of El Chaltén we saw a **Patagonian Hog-nosed Skunk** crossing the road!

The next day it rained so we postponed our hike towards Mirador Fitz Roy till the 11th of January. If you would also like to walk the loop Mirador Fitz Roy and Laguna Capri, then walk it early in the morning! (starting point is at [-49.32052, -72.89492](#)). We started at 05.30 and had most of the forest to ourselves. We did see some fresh Huemul faeces on the path, but no **Huemuls** to be seen. The walk was beautiful, but no birds or mammals of note. On the way back we encountered a more or less steady stream of tourists walking up from 09.00, which made the beautiful hike way less enjoyable as you can imagine. As we had tried so many times for Huemul without success and had done the hike we wanted, we got out of this town as soon as we could.



El Chaltén – Fitz Roy seen from Mirador Fitz Roy

El Chaltén – Fitz Roy seen from Laguna Capri

El Calafate - Argentina

[-50.34219, -72.24825](#)

Visited dates: 7-8 January 2022

Reserva Ecológica Municipal Laguna Nimez

[-50.32834, -72.2683](#)

This reserve is a bit expensive (1000 ARS p.p.) but it offers a nice walk along some lagoons. Lots of ducks can be found, among which **Andean Duck**, **Lake Duck** and **Black-headed Duck**. **White-winged Coot** and **Red-fronted Coot** can be found next to the commoner **Red-gartered Coot**. We found a few **Patagonian Mockingbirds** in the shrubs around the lagoons, as well as **Cordilleran Canastero**. The shore of Lago Patagonia could yield **Magellanic Plover**, which we didn't find here.



Andean duck making bubbles as a display ritual

Red Shoveler

Perito Moreno Glacier

[-50.47386, -73.03778](#)

Not really a bird/mammal spot, but we did see 3 young **South-American Grey Foxes** while camping just 6km from the entrance as well as a **Patagonian Hog-nosed Skunk** while driving the road towards the glacier just before 08.00 in the morning. **Magellanic Woodpecker** and **Austral Parakeet** have been observed in the forest, but we didn't see or hear these species. We were full focus on the glacier though and didn't put any effort in these species here.



Perito Moreno Glacier

3. The South

Torres del Paine - Chile

[-50.97962, -72.79992](#)

Visited dates: 20-24 December 2021

Accommodation: There is a range of hotels and campings in the park. You can sleep inside your motorhome for free at the official gates and at the information centre, where they leave the bathroom open at night.

General Information: The park is officially open from 08.00 – 19.00 and tickets are 26.000 CLP p.p. for 1-3 days and 36.400 CLP p.p. for 4 or more days. Puerto Natales is the last place to get fuel, so bring extra if you are planning on searching for Pumas like we did, and even more if you are combining it with Sierra Baguales. There is no signal in the park, so download all the info you need in advance.



Guanaco making a weird face at Torres del Paine

Driving in Torres del Paine from Serrano Gate

We stocked up on fuel for Forrest and fuel for ourselves and drove straight to the world-famous National Park Torres del Paine after arriving by boat in Puerto Natales. This is another one of those places we looked forward to for a long time, because this was the place to see Pumas (next to stunning landscapes)! We drove in at 22.00, and couldn't find anybody at the entrance, no matter how hard we knocked or shouted 'Hola'. We continued anyways and parked our car at the Information Centre for a night sleep. As it was very (and I mean VERY) windy we decided to turn around again at 04.30 and to sleep in a little bit. We started driving around 07.00 to explore the park a bit and mainly saw many Guanacos (but way less than in Patagonia NP). We explored the park and walked a 6,5km trail with again *very very* strong winds. We both had trouble walking against the wind. While sitting down at the viewpoint we were both suddenly blown to the ground by a wind gust! We even spoke to a guy that had to crawl about 25m to pass a part where the wind blew him to the ground multiple times! As you can imagine we didn't do much birding or look for pumas this day.



Torres del Paine view

Torres del Paine view

The next days were full focus on Pumas, and that meant waking up around 04.45 to start driving before sunrise and before the first tourists would crowd the park from 08.00 on. The general tactic seems to drive the road between Sarmiento Gate and Amarga Gate. The Sarmiento Trail in between those two gates is supposed to be really good for Pumas as well, but you are only allowed to walk it with a guide and in one direction (apparently because somebody got attacked by a Puma.. at least that's the story for this weird rule). Somebody we met did walk it alone and just when he saw 3 Pumas on his way back he ran into a CONAF ranger and almost got thrown out of the park. We tried to arrange a CONAF ranger to go with us, but they said they can't get paid (and also won't do it for free and get tipped instead of paid). You have to get an official guide from the hotels or from outside the park. We decided to drive the road in between the gates but didn't see any Pumas (multiple **South-American Grey Foxes** though!) and decided to leave the park. The paved roads east of the park are a blessing compared to the washboard roads inside the park, which makes searching way more comfortable. The area doesn't have a lot of fences but is all private property. The road and roadside are public though!



South-American Grey Fox



South-American Grey Foxes

Driving a few kilometres Romy suddenly saw something, "I see something! Foxes?!". "PUMAS, they're **PUMAS!!!**" was Rob's answer. A mother with two older young were sitting at a kill about 20 meters from the road. They seemed pretty skittish and started walking the other direction as soon as we parked our car at the side of the road. We tried to follow them with our binoculars from the car for a while but then lost them. When we wanted to give up on these three pumas and turned the car around,

Romy spotted another (different) **Puma**. As this one was walking in one direction on the hill, Rob quickly ran and laid down behind a bush. It didn't take long before the puma passed that spot within about 30m and sat down for a while. She even tried to hunt 2 **Guanacos**, but they noticed her too soon unfortunately (yes, we are rooting for the Puma 😊).

**Puma 1****Pumas 2 and 3**

That evening it was Romy again who spotted the 5th **Puma** near a fresh kill in the ditch next to the road. This was alongside the same 500m of road we found the other 3 + 1 Pumas that morning. Not much later Romy found the first 3 **Pumas** (mother with the 2 young) from that morning back on one of the hills. Rob got caught while trying to get a bit closer (it's forbidden to get off the roads). The owner of the property told us we can only be inside the car and we have to pay to be on the property. He didn't give any answer though on what the price would be, so that was unclear. The Pumas can be spotted closely from the road as well, so definitely try spotting here as well!

**Puma 4****Puma 5**

The next day Rob was the one to spot 2 **Pumas** up on the hillside. Although technically the Guanaco that screamed for its life was the first to spot the Pumas. Although far away, the sunrise made it a beautiful sighting with the silhouettes of these animals. We drove the loop towards Sarmiento Gate and arrived at 06.00 in the morning. Again we weren't able to find a ranger. Just after entering this gate there is a waterbody with lots of reed on the left (south) side of the road ([-51.02752, -72.77558](#)). This is where we found 2 **Austral Rails**, and we even saw them between the reeds just 3m from where

we were standing! We drove the rest of the loop towards Amarga Gate again and back, but found nothing. Scanning all the rocky outcrops Rob in the park found another **Puma** (nr. 11!) high up on one of the cliffs.



Pumas 9 and 10 at sunrise

Puma and Guanaco at sunrise

The time in between searching for Pumas was filled with drinking coffee while watching the mountains and beautiful lakes. We even had a rare moment without any wind, giving a nice reflection in the water (when a guide from a tour group starts taking pictures you know it's rare).



Torres del Paine view

Guanaco

We drove up to Camping Pehoe because there was a habituated **Southern Huemul** around this place. Yes, was. The animal died in 2020, so too bad for everyone hoping to get an easy mammal tick here. Rangers and others pointed us in the direction of Hotel Lago Grey ([-51.12257, -73.11595](#)), but neither the hotel employees or rangers had seen any the last few months when driving the road. The CONAF ranger said that they have their young (or are pregnant?) this time of year, and tend to be more wary as they don't really have a good defence against predators/pumas. If I understood him correctly the population wasn't doing so well either the last few years, and he mentioned many factors including predation, competition from cattle and diseases. Whatever the whole story was, what I did understand from it was this: chances to spot a Huemul here are low. The long drive up here is still worth it to see the glacier from far away and to see amazing icebergs in the glacial lake! (less so if you're also visiting Moreno Glacier by the way). At night we spotlighted the road back, using our Lahoux Spotter Heat Scope as the conditions were perfect because it had been a colder day. However, the only mammals

we spotted were many cows. No Huemuls. No Pumas either driving the road inside the park between Sarmiento Gate and Amarga Gate again.



Torres del Paine view of Lago Grey

Torres del Paine view of Lago Grey

The last morning we decided to search for Pumas again on the part of road that gave us already 10 Pumas so far (only 1 inside the park). Romy had Puma-spotting-luck again and found a **Puma** next to a kill about 50m from the road. This one started walking after a Guanaco started shouting from the other side of the valley. We followed the Puma from the road until it was out of sight and then went back to the place we first saw it. Right there we saw our first **Patagonian Hog-nosed Skunk** walking on the road! The Guanaco was still calling and I said that there must be another Puma nearby (which was most likely the reason the other Puma left). Romy looked out of the window, and yes, there it was: another **Puma**. This one walked past our car about 15-20 meters from us and went up the same hill as the other Puma had disappeared on. What a great way to end our time in/around Torres del Paine! This place is, to say it in one word: freaking amazing! (you can't express the awesomeness of this place in one word..;))

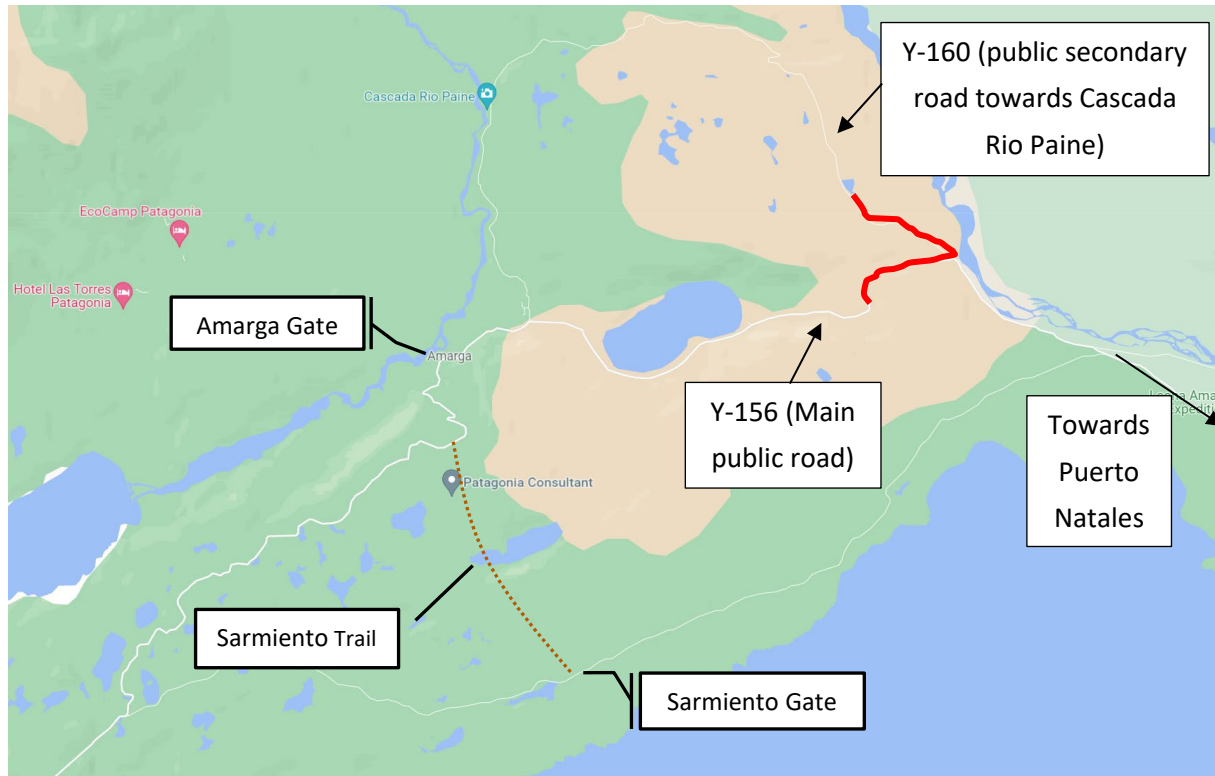


Puma 12 after the Guanaco started shouting

Puma 13 crossing the road

For those searching for Pumas we would advise (at least based on our experience) going to the private sector and drive the roads there. We had 13 Puma sightings (probably 8-10 different individuals) total in 2,5 days of searching (which included searching in the NP without anything for 1 morning and 1 evening). All but one along one stretch of road (see map, coordinates between [-50.97252, -72.70209](#) and [-50.95201, -72.70963](#)). When we were there this area had the highest abundance of Guanacos, so

this might be the biggest reason for the presence of many Pumas. We highlighted the parts of the Y-156/main public road (tarred) and of the Y-160/secondary road (gravel) where we had our sighting. Be sure to start driving around sunrise (when we were there around 05.00). Tourists flock the main road from 08.00 in the morning, less so on the Y-160. In the evening buses and tourist vans drive out of the park till about 20.00 (and less till 21.00), after which the main road is quiet again.



Driving the Y-156



Four-eared Guanaco!

Sierra Baguales – Chile

-50.88459, -72.3652

Visited dates: 22 December 2021

General Information: This place is best visited in combination with Torres del Paine, but be sure you have enough fuel. This place can be skipped if the places in Argentina mentioned in this trip report are

also visited. The road condition is good and driveable with a normal sedan. You don't have to open fences anymore like in previous reports (all cattle grids now). Only two fences have to be opened the old way, but birding-wise we would recommend to turn around before the first of these 2 (so don't go further than [-50.81959, -72.40428](#)). The second one has a sign that it's private property and you're not allowed to enter. The best place for *White-throated Caracara* seems out of reach because of this (although they are spotted from the part before that as well according to eBird).

This location involves roadside birding between Patagonian shrubs. We had a really quick sighting of a *Band-tailed Earthcreeper* and observed a group of 5-6 *Patagonian Mockingbirds*. We saw *Cordilleran Canastero* and *Sharp-billed Canastero*, but no *Austral Canastero*. There are a lot of sheep carcasses in the fields and some Guanaco carcasses and there were many *Andean Condors* on it. Birding this place in the early morning or late evening might even yield *Puma*, although *Culpeo* is also known to take down sheep. There are many (freshly dug) holes in the side of the road, and considering the shape they are probably from *Large Hairy Armadillos*. We weren't able to visit this place again at a better time unfortunately, but it seems promising mammal-wise as well.



Band-tailed Earthcreeper



Patagonian Mockingbird

Y-405 – Chile

[-52.1003, -70.68857](#)

Visited dates: 24-25 + 31 December 2021 – 1 January 2022

General Information: This road is in good condition and can be driven with a normal sedan all the way towards Punta Delgades coming from Puerto Natales (or the other way around of course). It makes for a great -but long- loop together with Ruta 9 and Ruta 255 in combination with Tierra del Fuego.

The road passes Patagonian shrubland and grassland and you will see many *Guanacos*. We drove this road in the early morning and had 14 *South-American Grey Foxes* and 2 playing *Patagonian Hog-nosed Skunks* right next to the road! We also had a *Large Hairy Armadillo* running alongside our car in the evening and found another two *Patagonian Hog-nosed Skunks* on the short road from the Y-405 towards Puesto Límite. Driving slowly you can spot many *Tawny-throated Dotterels*, which were hard to photograph as they were quite shy. *Rufous-chested Dotterels* were not too uncommon among

certain parts as well. We had **Two-banded Plover** near some water pools. We didn't find **Patagonian Yellow-finch**, but there are many, many Rufous-colored Sparrows (and we got tired of stopping every time we saw a group of small birds). **White-bridled Finch** and **Least Seedsnipe** are common, and in winter **White-bellied Seedsnipes** can be found here. We found 2 **Short-billed Miners** on the road towards Pali Aike NP (which was closed when we arrived).



Rufous-chested Dotterel



South-American Grey Foxes

Cueva la Leona - Chile

[-52.48025, -71.12261](#)

Visited dates: 1-3 January 2022

General Information: This is a historical site of a canyon/cave where the native inhabitants of the region lived about 8000 years ago. There is a sign next to the road pointing to the left, but when you look around you only see a flat field. Park on the left side of the road, and cross the fence. Chileans do it (and many came the afternoons we were there!), and the Carabineros/police that drove by seemed fine with it as well, as they just waved. It's a 50m walk towards the biggest canyon (about 10m high and 20m wide). At the end there are 2 more small canyons on the right and a wider valley on the left.

We saw a report of an Armadillo at this location and a friend of ours went up here for that reason. He had an amazing encounter with a family of 6 Skunks from 19.00 in the evening, and the next morning till 07.00. We decided to drive up there and spent 2 nights here as well (as we had some time to kill anyways) and weren't disappointed. We found 2 **Austral Canasteros** just after the turn off Ruta 9. At the Cueva we saw the first 2 **Patagonian Hog-nosed Skunks** climbing over a pile of rocks in the middle of the deepest canyon at 20.45. They searched for insects and whatnot between the rocks and were busy not being blown away by the wind (5-6 Bft). Sitting down another Skunk came walking from the south and turned around as soon as he saw us sitting on its path. One of the two resident **Magellanic Horned Owls** went after it, but missed. We walked up and down the valley and Romy found a **Large Hairy Armadillo** behind a bush. This was a very obliging one, and we had all the time in the world to make pictures! It didn't look too good, and it was only after 5 minutes Rob decided to walk up and see if it was actually alive. The truth? It wasn't. Such an obliging animal was too good to be true anyways, but they were around!

Not much later another Skunk came from the north and also decided to turn around as soon as he saw -or smelled?!- us. We followed it around the corner, towards the broader and shallower valley. Around the corner we noticed a **Large Hairy Armadillo** at the end of the valley, and not much later another one behind it! The skunk went to the large fields above the valley after a quick encounter with one of the Armadillos. We stayed with the Armadillos and one of them was really inquisitive and came towards us. He started smelling us and scratched our shoes. He was startled by our movements, but would come back again to scratch our shoes. Not sure what he was thinking of finding in there... The next morning we returned at 06.00, but we found only the Owls at their roost.

The second evening we encountered 1 **Patagonian Hog-nosed Skunk** in the middle of the largest canyon. As we didn't have good pictures of this species yet, we followed this one towards the larger valley. Here we were able to follow it for a long time. We didn't find any other Skunks or Armadillos this evening, but we went to our car already at 22.30 as it was almost freezing outside. Most likely the Armadillos would have been seen if we stayed longer. Walking back we did see that some small sticks in front of some hollows -which I put there-, were gone. So for sure we missed some activity at the beginning of the largest canyon (closest to the parking) while we were following the other Skunk. The next morning we woke up at 06.00, but again found nothing in the canyons. On our way out towards Punta Arenas we encountered 2 **Patagonian Hog-nosed Skunks** playing on the side of the road just before the turn-off. A great place to visit!



Patagonian Hog-nosed Skunk

Large Hairy Armadillo

Laguna los Palos

-52.719, -71.05138

Visited dates: 25 December 2021

You can park along the main road (Ruta 9). This laguna is fenced off, so best to bring a spotting scope. We climbed the fence to get a closer look at the **Magellanic Oystercatchers**, **Baird's Sandpipers** and some **White-rumped Sandpipers**. Between them were 2 **Magellanic Plovers**! What a great species!



Magellanic Plover

Magellanic Plover

Pta Arenas/Tres Puentes - Chile [-53.11604, -70.88108](#)

Visited dates: 3 January 2022

This is a nice humedal (wetland) if you are in for a quick stop to spot for birds. Many ducks, flamingos and waders here. We even saw a **Pectoral Sandpiper**, a rarity so far south! **Ruddy-headed Goose** is sometimes seen in the fields here. There are also (introduced) **Muskrat** in the humedal.

Pta Arenas/Ruta 9 – Chile

[-38.72902, -72.58788](#)

Visited dates: 28 December 2021 + 3-4 January 2022

We drove Ruta 9 from Punta Arenas south towards Rio San Juan/Monumento Natural Canquén Colorado to see **Ruddy-headed Goose**. At the first field we stopped in San Juan we saw many geese, most of them **Upland Goose**, some **Ashy-headed Goose** and 1 **Ruddy-headed Goose**. On our way back we saw another group of 7 Ruddy-headed Goose north of the river mouth ([-53.64262, -70.94652](#)).

We wanted to watch seabirds from Fuerte Bulnes ([-53.63035, -70.91711](#)), but the road towards here was closed for some unclear reason.

Ruta 9 is not very scenic to drive, and the geese can be seen on other locations as well. If there is a day with less wind for a change, then it's worth watching the sea for cetaceans. We had multiple pods of **Peale's Dolphin** on route towards San Juan.

Y-535 – Chile

[-52.38884, -69.49171](#)

Visited dates: 28-29 December 2021

This road goes through nice Patagonian grasslands and it seemed like the only (slightly) reliable place for the elusive **Patagonian Tinamou**. A local mollusc-gatherer came to our motorhome and asked if we

were searching for this species and said he had seen it walking with two chicks the previous afternoon (which seemed right as there were some recent sighting on eBird as well with chicks). We drove a few km on the (good) gravel road, which can be driven with a normal sedan. We stopped every now and then to scan and listen. We suddenly heard one bird calling. With our Lahoux Spotter we were able to locate at least 3 warm dots in the grass far away. This proved to be **Patagonian Tinamous!** All we got was a proof picture. When we tried to get any closer by foot the birds were long gone.

Punta Delgada ferry - Chile

[-52.45688, -69.54579](#)

Visited dates: 29 + 31 December 2021

General Information: This ferry runs between Punta Delgada and Puerto Progreso from 08.00 – 22.00 and costs 16.400 CLP per car. It seems pedestrians are free, so it might be an option to take it forth and back a few times. You don't have to reserve a ticket as they go as soon as the ferry has filled up. Too much wind or waves can delay the crossing, so you better not be on a tight schedule.

We observed **Magellanic Penguin** and 3 **Commerson's Dolphins** on our trip south. One of them jumping right next to the boat (2 meter to the side). On the way back we had a lot of wind and waves. We saw one Penguin and only Romy spotted a fin of one Commerson's Dolphin again.



Nothing more than proof of a **Patagonian Tinamou**

Commerson's Dolphin

Laguna los Cisnes - Chile

[-53.20379, -70.29671](#)

Visited dates: 29 December 2021

We had seen most of our targets, so we wanted to see **Magellanic Plover** again. Laguna los Cisnes is the place most people search for this species. We walked the southern end of the beach for about 1km, but only found **Baird's Sandpiper** and some **White-rumped Sandpipers**. We did had a short sighting of **Short-billed Miner** on the road 1km before this laguna.



White-rumped Sandpiper

Baird's Sandpiper

Parque Pingüino Rey - Chile

[-53.46071, -69.30699](#)

Visited dates: 30 + 31 December 2021

General Information: Normally this place is open between 11.00 – 17.00 and the price would be 12.000 CLP. Because of Covid they only let in 15 people per hour. Therefore you have to reserve a slot between 10.00 – 17.00 and the price is reduced to 8.000 CLP.

Not much to say about this place, except that these **King Penguins** are just amazing! We saw 88 of them from the 'hide' which is about 40-50 meters away from the penguins. They started the reserve in 2010 with 8 penguins left, after about 120 of them showed up in 2008. But people caught them to keep them as a pet (yes, I'm talking about 2008, not the stone ages). They do a lot of work on communicating the importance of nature conservation, with this species as their main subject and locals are now happy with the reserve (unlike in 2010). However, according to the guide they still have (crazy) people showing up from the beach every year to try and catch (young) penguins. The place is closed in the winter, but from the higher grounds in front of the entrance it is possible to see them with binoculars.

Just before the entrance is a kind of 'loop' for parking your car. There are lots of holes right next to it, and we observed 5-6 **Magellanic Tuco-tucos** at night. They were about impossible to find without our Lahoux Spotter heat scope, but patience might reward you if you don't have a heat scope.



King Penguin

King Penguins

Ushuaia - Argentina

-54.80148, -68.30345

Visited dates: Due to Covid the borders towards the Argentinean side of Tierra del Fuego were kept closed by the Chilean Government. This made it impossible for us to visit the far south of the continent for now. But we'll be back!

General Information: Targets to look for around Ushuaia which you most likely won't find in Chile (in summer) are *White-bellied Seedsnipe*, *White-throated Caracara*, *Striated Caracara*, *Blackish Cinclodes*, *Gentoo Penguin* and possibly *Snowy Sheathbill*.

You made it! Thank you for reading 😊

For all photos of our Chile & Argentina trip, comments, compliments, any specific questions, visit and/or contact us via our website:

🌐 www.robjansenphotography.com/chile

🌐 www.robjansenphotography.com/argentina

📷 www.instagram.com/robjansenphotography

All observations made by us in Chile & Argentina can be found on Observation.org. We observed a total of 105 bird species and 10 mammal species (plus 3 introduced species) in Patagonia – Chile & Argentina. Click here for the: [total bird list](#), [total mammal list](#) or [the total species list](#).

Top 5	Birds	Mammals
1	King Penguin	Puma
2	Hooded Grebe	Patagonian Hog-nosed Skunk
3	Magellanic Plover	Commerson's Dolphin
4	Rufous-chested Dotterel	Large Hairy Armadillo
5	Austral Rail	South-American Grey Fox

Purchasing Photos

If you like my pictures, you are in luck: they are for sale! For publication, presswork or just as artwork in your office or at home. A great memory of those great species you've seen during that trip! We donate 10% of our profits to WWF. My photos can be used for free for conservation or educational purposes after consultation. Have a look on my website or contact us via the website for the possibilities if you are interested: www.robjansenphotography.com/shop



Puma on the hunt for Guanaco, hiding behind a bush Puma stealth mode activated



Puma 2



Puma 12 with a Guanaco close by



Magellanic Penguin



Tawny-throated Dotterel



Magellanic Oystercatcher



Austral Canastero