

Inala Nature Tours

TRIP REPORT

Tonia Cochran | October – November 2024



Araucaria at Conguillio. Photo: T. Cochran

Chile: Gondwana Connections

Northern Chile: Day 1

Sat 26 October Santiago

The group gathered at the Santiago airport hotel after arriving on various flights and by various routes from Australia and met each other and our local Chilean biologist guide Paola at dinner. We then had an early night in preparation for the tour ahead.



Inca Terns. Photo: T. Cochran

Day 2

Sun 27 October Santiago to Arica

This morning, we connected with our early flight from Santiago to the city of Arica which is next to the Peruvian border. This northern extreme of Chile is known as the “Big North” and includes the vast Atacama Desert and the High Andean steppes of the Altiplano. Although located in the driest desert on earth, Arica has a good bird population, which is only possible because of rivers and small water courses which are fed by runoff from the High Andes allowing the existence of fertile valleys and well-cultivated flood plains that form rich oasis in this harsh environment. Our main target for the day was the critically endangered endemic Chilean Woodstar (the world’s population estimated at 350 individuals by the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species), which is now only known from the Arica and Parinacota regions of northern Chile. We were in luck, as a male obligingly kept returning to the same bare branch in the scrub thicket to enable us to all have a good view. We also saw Pied-crested Tit-tyrant, Shiny Cowbird and our first House Wren in this area. We then headed to the seaside town of Caleta Camarones where we saw the aptly named Seaside Cinclodes (unfairly also locally known as the diarrhoea bird) which

was perched on the rocky reef next to the shoreline. Belcher's and Kelp Gulls were also seen here, while Four-banded Pacific Iguana were sunbaking and head-bobbing to each other on the rocks. Huge fronds of Giant Kelp (*Macrocystis pyrifera*), which is interestingly the same species found in southern Australian oceanic waters, were swirling in the cold water next to the jetty supported by their air-filled bladders which keep the fronds afloat. Our next stop was short, specifically to see a small deciduous tree in the pea family (Fabaceae) called Chilean Palo Verde (*Geoffroea decorticans*), which has many uses in traditional medicine, as a dye, fuel, in carpentry and as a food where the fruit is processed into a sweet thick dark syrup called *arrobe*, which is used as a sweetener and cough medicine. Then onto a local wharf where several pairs of Inca Terns were displaying. These were quickly voted bird of the day, a title they held throughout most of the trip because of their striking appearance. We also saw our first Black-crowned Night-herons perched on the light poles on the wharf, a bunch of Turkey Vultures sifting through a nearby rubbish bin and two South American Sealions hopefully patrolling the water nearby. We then headed to our accommodation which was located right on the beach overlooking a rocky reef which was heaving with seabirds including hundreds of Grey Gulls, Blackish Oystercatcher, Whimbrel, Hudsonian Godwit, Willet, Ruddy Turnstone and Neotropic Cormorant. Peruvian Pelican and Peruvian Booby were also seen flying through. After dinner at a local seafront restaurant, we headed back home and fell asleep to the sound of gulls and crashing waves.



Candelabra Cactus (*Browningia candelaris*). Photo: T. Cochran

Day 3

Mon 28 October Arica to Putre

This morning, we travelled along the coast north of Arica to an estuary which formed small shallow brackish lakes next to the sea. In the dunes on the way to the beach we saw a brightly coloured male Peruvian Meadowlark singing to its mate. In the first lagoon we nabbed Common Gallinule, many more Grey Gulls, Blecher's and Kelp Gulls and an Andean Gull, Elegant Terns, a Little Blue Heron and a Snowy Egret, Great Egret and Puna Ibis. The second lagoon was also alive with birds, including a large flock of Black Skimmers which were doing their best to 'skim' in the small body of water, while Wilson's Phalarope and Greater Yellowlegs were doing their best to avoid them. Several Black-crowned Night-herons were perched in the vegetation at the back of the lake near a small group of Cinnamon Teal. We also saw a Killdeer with young chicks which took cover under their mum, so she looked as though she had 6 legs. At least one pair of American Oystercatchers on the nearby beach also had young chicks and many Turkey Vultures patrolled the beach nearby. In the scrub near the bus, we also picked up our first West Peruvian Dove with its gorgeous blue eyeliner, and Croaking Ground Dove, before heading to another nearby location on the hunt for the cryptic Peruvian Thick-knee. As we were slowly scanning the sand and grass, Wilga saw a Burrowing Owl, but we were about to admit defeat on the thick-knee front when we located three individuals sitting completely stationary in the short grass eyeing us off with the utmost confidence in their camouflage. A roadside stop shortly afterwards yielded Rufous-collared Sparrow, the northern form of White-crested (Peruvian) Elaenia, a strikingly coloured male Vermillion Flycatcher, Hooded Siskin and House Wren. Today we also saw our first Variable Hawk and Aplomado Falcon. Our destination for the day was the town of Putre, the capital of the province of Parinacota, located in the high Andes (altiplano) at 3,550 metres (around 11,500 feet). After travelling through the arable areas along the watercourse near Arica, we ascended to the arid mountains where the vegetation became more and more sparse and dotted with huge (up to 5 metre tall), ancient Candelabra Cactus (*Browningia candelaris*), which spread their wide-spread arms along the mountain crests. We wended our way ever upwards through cactus-cover hillsides (mostly 'Old Man of the Andes' (*Oreocereus leucotrichus*) to a grove of very special, arid tolerant, gnarly *Polylepis* trees which are members of the rose family and have beautiful burgundy coloured bark through which *Mutisia* vines with bright orange-coloured flowers wended. We reached our accommodation in Putre late afternoon where we picked up our first Slender-billed and Mourning Sierra Finches in the garden, before heading to dinner in a nearby restaurant. Then off to bed in anticipation of our visit to Lauca National Park tomorrow.

Day 4

Tue 29 October Lauca National Park

Lauca National Park is a place of outstanding natural beauty located in the heart of the Altiplano of the 'Big North'. It was declared part of the World Network of Biosphere Reserves (WNBR) in 1981. The towering snow-capped volcanoes of Pomerape and Parinacota soar to over 6,300 metres (11,811 ft) and they reflect perfectly in the deep blue water of Chungara and Cotacotani Lakes. Chungara Lake is one of the highest altitude lakes in the world and here and in smaller nearby lakes and lagoons we

picked up Crested and Andean Duck, Puna and Yellow-billed Teal, Chilean and Andean Flamingo, Silvery (Andean) Grebe, Giant and Slate-coloured Coot, Neotropic Cormorant, Andean Avocet with chicks, and Andean Gulls on nests in the shallows of the lagoons. A flock of Baird's Sandpiper, Black Siskins, Andean Lapwing and Andean Goose were seen on the shore. On a drive in the nearby grassland, our driver Christian picked up three Puna Tinamou for us. We then visited the 'ghost town' of Parinacota which now appears to be taken over by very adorable Mountain Viscachas (rabbit-like mammals that are actually a relative of the Chinchilla) which easily won 'critter of the day' (and possibly the trip). We then took a walk where we saw several almost as adorable Bolivian Big-eared Mice grazing in the festuca grassland accompanied by a flock of White-winged Duica (Glacier) Finches, darting in and out of their burrows amongst the rocks at the slightest sign of danger, while a huge female Andean Condor glided overhead. We also saw several more Mountain Viscachas here, one of which had a half-grown baby which snuggled up to mum. Several Vicuñas and their domesticated camelid cousins Llamas (which we learned to pronounce correctly as 'yama') and Alpacas were also seen throughout the day. We also saw a Mountain Caracara on a nest in a rock ledge (clearly identifiable by the banded black and white tail hanging over the nest), Puna Miner, White-winged Cinclodes, White-fronted Ground-tyrant, Black-billed Shrike-tyrant and Andean Swallow were also added to the list. It was also a good day for Sierra Finch species with Black-hooded, Ash-breasted and more Mourning Sierra Finch, and we also added Golden-spotted Ground Dove. Plant of the day went to the weirdly shaped chartreuse-coloured cushion plant *Azorella compacta*, which is a strange member of the carrot family. We also saw dome shaped *Cumulopuntia* cactus with bright orange flowers nestled amongst the prickly spines. Back at our accommodation in Putre we found Cordilleran Canastero and Oasis Hummingbird nesting in the eaves of the roof, with the birds darting back and forth in attendance. Andean Hillstar was also briefly seen.



Mountain Viscacha. Photo: W. Kottek

Day 5

Wed 30 October Putre to Arica

Early this morning we headed out for a birdwalk around the property grounds and nearby gorge. In the garden and just outside the gate we picked up Cinereous Conebill, Hooded Siskin, Rufous-collared Sparrow, House Wren, Cordilleran Canastero, Oasis Hummingbird (once again zipping back and forth to its nest) and Mourning and Black-hooded Sierra Finch. We heard a Peruvian Pygmy Owl in a tree in the gorge but had no luck spotting it. But we did have great views of several bird species in a tree (ironically a Tasmanian Bluegum) including a gorgeous Blue-and-yellow Tanager, Black-throated Flower-piercer, Chiguanco Thrush and a small colony of nesting House Sparrows, while a small flock of Bare-faced Ground Dove foraged in a disused garden bed. We also saw Mountain Parakeet nesting holes in the banks of the gorge. We then headed off in the bus to a small farm in Putre to look for tinamou which weren't showing today. However, we did get good views of Buff-breasted Earthcreeper, Cream-winged Cinclodes, Andean Hillstar and Giant Hummingbird here. We then called into the village of Socoroma which also seemed deserted at this time of day where we saw Croaking Ground Dove and West Peruvian Dove. Spot-winged Pigeon was also seen today. We then had a delicious home-made lunch at the home of a local woodworking artist and his artist wife, who have created an oasis of green in the surrounding arid plant-free hillsides and placed several feeders around the grounds to attract the local hummingbirds. During and after lunch we watched two species, Peruvian Sheartail and Oasis Hummingbird, squabble over the feeders, before reluctantly leaving to return to Arica. Along the way we added another American Kestrel and Plumbeous Sierra Finch to the list. On our arrival at Arica, we once again picked up a variety of shorebirds on the rocky reef outside our hotel (Blackish and American Oystercatcher, Whimbrel, Willet, Ruddy Turnstone, Grey, Belcher's and Kelp Gull, Neotropic Cormorant and Snowy Egret).



Oasis Hummingbird. Photo: W. Kottek

Main tour: Day 6

Thu 31 October Arica to Santiago

This morning, we flew back to Santiago, arriving around lunchtime where we met the final member of our group, Ruth, at our Santiago hotel, where we would stay for the next 3 nights. We then headed to lunch and then took some free time for the group to rest or explore by themselves before gathering again for dinner.



Alstroemeria ligtu & *A. pulchra*. Photo: T. Cochran

Day 7

Fri 1 November La Campana National Park

Today we met our new driver Henry and explored La Campana National Park which is located in the Coastal Range in the Valparaiso Region about 1.5 hours' drive from Santiago and one of the most important expeditions of the British naturalist Charles Darwin who explored this valley in 1834. Because of its high rates of biodiversity and endemism, it was declared a Biosphere Reserve by UNESCO (WNBR The World Network of Biosphere Reserves). One of the floral highlights in the park are the endemic and long-lived (over 1,000-year-old) Chilean Palms (*Jubaea chilensis*), which are accompanied by giant terrestrial bromeliads (*Puya chilensis*) and giant cactus, *Leucostele* (*Echinopsis*) *chiloensis* which form one of the three vegetation types found in the park (the Matorral, which is a mix

of short and spiny scrubs, bushes and cacti). The other two vegetation types – Sclerophyllous forest, formed by different species of hard-leaved trees, and Savannah plains covered with acacia (*Vachellia caven*) – were also seen here. Gondwanan flora we saw today included *Drimys winteri* (a sacred tree for Indigenous people), *Alstroemeria ligtu* and *A. pulchra* in flower and *Crinodendron patagua*. We also saw endemic Moustached Turca and Dusky-tailed Canastero and had great views of many other species including Chilean Flicker and a pair of House Wrens who were nesting in the eaves of the toilet block, Striped Woodpecker, Giant Hummingbird, Tufted Tit-tyrant, Picui Ground Dove, White-crested Elaenia, White-throated Treerunner, Thorn-tailed Rayadito, Austral Blackbird, Chilean Mockingbird, Band-tailed Sierra Finch, Fire-eyed Duicon, Grassland Yellow-finch and Common Diuca-finch. Californian Quail, Eared Dove, Rufous-collared Sparrow, Chilean Swallow and Chimango Caracara were also seen here and were common birds throughout the trip. Other raptors seen today included American Kestrel, Aplomado Falcon, Black-chested Buzzard-eagle and Peregrine Falcon.

We also watched a colony of Common Degu (diurnal endemic rodents belonging to the family Octodontidae) darting around, including a mother with half grown young.

In the afternoon we visited the Batuco Wetlands, the last sizeable wetlands left in central Chile, which attract large congregations of waterfowl. Bird species we picked up here included Black-necked Swan, Cinnamon Teal, Chiloe Wigeon, Great Grebe, Red-gartered Coot feeding chicks, Yellow-winged Blackbird and a huge Cooi Heron flying overhead. In the extensive reedbeds we also saw a furtive Many-coloured Rush-tyrant and heard Wren-like Rushbird. Two Coypu (large semiaquatic rodents) were seen swimming in the water and foraging amongst the rushes and two lizards of the genus *Liolaemus* (*L. lemniscatus* and *L. tenuis*) were also seen today. Jack found a large Chilean Rose Tarantula scuttling across the path to the wetlands. We then returned to Santiago for a late dinner at one of the restaurants near the hotel before heading to bed.



Coypu & Great Grebe. Photos: W. Kottek

Day 8

Sat 2 November Highlands above Santiago

After an early breakfast we travelled east to Farellones, a popular ski resort in the heart of the Andes Range and an excellent location to see native high-altitude flora and fauna in the spring and summer months. At our first stop we picked up a range of new species for the trip, including Rufous-tailed Plantcutter, Buff-winged Cinclodes, White-browed Ground-tyrant, Black-billed Shrike-tyrant, Blue and White Swallow, Austral Thrush and Grey-hooded Sierra Finch, as well as more White-crested Elaenia and Chilean Mockingbird. We also added the high-altitude specialists, Greater Yellow finch and Rufous-Banded Miner, and a quick view of an Olive Grass Mouse which scurried between some low growing bushes as we passed. We then visited an extensive area of boggy alpine ground with small streams where we saw Andean Geese and a pair of Grey-breasted Seedsnipe and had our first views of the strikingly coloured Black-faced Ibis. Despite the clear blue sky, the ground was still frozen and finger-like nodules of ice encapsulated the grass next to the flowing stream. Scale-throated Earthcreeper was also seen here and we also had close views of an El Plomo Smooth-throated Lizard (*Leiolamnus bellii*) basking on a stone in the sun and several Coruro, another Octodontid rodent species with fine black pelts prominent yellow incisors, digging frantically in the soil with frequent stops to check for predators with just head and shoulders above ground level. Massive Andean Condors soared in the thermals overhead; several more of these huge birds were also seen perched on the roofs of the buildings at the ski resort itself which we visited next. On the roadside at a lower altitude, we also saw a Variable Hawk hassling a perched sub-adult Black-chested Buzzard-eagle, Black-winged Ground Dove and had more good views of Moustached Turca. We then headed home for an earlier afternoon to relax at our hotel in Santiago, our minds filled with spectacular scenery and the species we encountered today.



Valle Nevado. Photo: T. Cochran

Day 9

Sun 3 November Santiago to Altos de Lircay to Vilches

Early this morning, we met our new guide Nelson and Henry's partner and co-driver Cristina, who stayed with us for the rest of the main tour. Our destination for today was Altos de Lircay National Park, located in the southern limit of the Mediterranean Region in the transition area between the Temperate Rainforest and the Mediterranean Ecoregion of Chile. Here we saw our first southern beeches (genus *Nothofagus*); seven of the 11 South American species are found here, including some huge *Nothofagus dombeyi* on which pale pink parasitic, edible golf-ball shaped fungus grew from galls on the branches, and *Nothofagus obliqua*. The ground was covered with patches of flowering white orchids (*Codonorchis lessonii*), mosses, ferns, native yellow violets (*Viola maculata*) and strawberries (*Fragaria chilensis*, one of two species of wild strawberry that were hybridized to create the modern strawberry); the understory included two shrubby members of the pea family Arnott's Cassia (*Senna arnottiana*) and Mayu (*Sophora macrocarpa*) with their prominent, large yellow flowers. We also saw several *Nothofagus* Forest bird specialties such as Austral Parakeet (the world's most southerly parrot species), a confiding Magellanic Tapaculo and the colourful Patagonian Sierra Finch and heard our first Chestnut-Throated Huet-huet. We had good views of the rare and difficult to find White-Throated Hawk and a pair of Rufous-legged Owls that were roosting in the *Nothofagus* near the forest trail despite the mist. White-throated Treerunner, Thorn-tailed Rayadito, White-crested Elaenia, House Wren Austral Thrush, Chilean Swallow, Striped Woodpecker were also seen today as was Variable Hawk and Western Cattle Egret enroute to the park. We then headed to our accommodation in Vilches before walking to a nearby area called Piedra Tacitas (translated to the 'teacups') where the large rocks were used as grinding stones by pre-Columbian Indigenous residents. Here we had our first views of a Green-backed Firecrown, a hummingbird that is aptly named when the intensely territorial males flash their iridescent red-yellow crown. *Lomatia hirsuta* (a member of the Protea family with members of the same genus in Australia) and Chilean Hazelnut *Gevuina avellana* (another member of the Proteaceae which is closely related to macadamias) were found here as large understory bushes. We ate at a local restaurant in town tonight.

Day 10

Mon 4 November Vilches and Colbún Lake

This morning (after seeing a beautiful Chilean Rose Tarantula on the verandah of the hotel) we walked around the grounds and back to the Piedra Tacitas area and nearby stream where we made a concerted effort to find the cryptic Chestnut-throated Huet-huet, which was heard well by the group but only seen briefly by a few. Some of the group had a good look at a Chilean Hawk (which looked remarkably like the Australian Brown Goshawk), and we also had more good views of Austral Parakeet and White-throated Treerunner, Green-backed Firecrown, as well as Black-chinned Siskin, Chilean Pigeon and Plain-mantled Tit-spinetail. We then travelled to Colbún Lake where we saw flocks of Upland Goose, Spectacled Duck, Cinnamon Teal, Chiloe Wigeon, Yellow-billed Pintail, Rosy-billed Pochard with

ducklings, Great Grebe, Red-gartered and White-winged Coot, many Southern Lapwings, Chimango Caracara and Black-faced Ibis, Andean Gull, Neotropic Cormorant, Snowy and Great Egret, Cocoli Heron, and a displaying Correndera Pipit. Duica Finch, Spectacled Tyrant, Shiny Cowbird, Mourning and Band-tailed Sierra Finch and Picui Ground Dove were also seen today. After lunch (where we saw a large group of Burrowing Parakeets feeding on the road verge), we visited the Cascada Invertida (inverted waterfall) where the wind blows the spray back over the cliff top, to view this amazing phenomenon and admire the surrounding spectacular scenery. Andean Condor, Black and Turkey Vulture soared above, two lizard species (*Liolaemus buergeri* and *L. pseudolemniscatus*) were sunbaking on the rocks, and Grey-hooded Sierra Finches waited expectantly at the carpark and provided excellent photographic opportunities. We then headed back to our accommodation and dinner in Vilches.



Spectacled Tyrant. Photo: W. Kottek

Day 11

Tue 5 November Vilches Saltos del Laja and Conguillio NP

After breakfast, we left Vilches and headed south, with our first stop at some agricultural land which included an onion field where we saw Chilean Tinamou. We then headed to the scenically beautiful (but quite touristy) Laja Waterfalls, four falls of between 40 and 55 meters (130 and 180 ft.) in height and part of the Laja River. Here we saw our first Dark-bellied Cinclodes and Austral Negrito. We then travelled to our accommodation in Conguillio National Park, our destination for the next two nights. In addition to birds that we had seen previously, highlights included large flocks of Burrowing Parakeets and two Long-tailed Meadowlark.

Day 12

Wed 6 November Conguillio National Park

This morning, after a pre-breakfast walk around the lodge grounds where we saw a new species of *Nothofagus* (*N. alpina*), we headed to Conguillío National Park (derived from the indigenous [Mapudungún](#) word for "water with Araucaria seeds") for the day. Located in the provinces of Cautín and Malleco in the Araucanía Region of Chile in the higher altitudes of the Andes Mountains, it is well known for its extensive forests of *Nothofagus* (Southern Beeches) and huge *Araucaria araucana* (Monkey Puzzle) trees and its spectacular scenery. The Llaima and Sierra Nevada volcanoes are responsible for modelling the landscape, with vast areas of lava flows characterized by islands of vegetation. During the day, we visited two stunningly beautiful lakes (Arco Iris with its beautiful turquoise coloured water and Verde) where we saw Ashy-headed Goose, Flying Steamer Duck, Spectacled Duck and Chilean and Blue and White Swallows. Variable and White-throated Hawk were also seen today, and we also had our first views of the striking Crested Caracara. In the forested areas we heard Magellanic Tapaculo and had good views of Buff-winged Cinclodes, Plain-mantled Tit-tyrant, Patagonian Tyrant, Patagonia Sierra Finch and Duica Finch. We also saw *Liolaemus pictus* lizards sunbaking in the leaf litter at the side of the tracks, and another recently described species, *L. lonquimayensis*, sunbaking on the exposed larva. We also saw some beautiful large flower spikes of the golden and green Fragrant Gavilea Orchid (*Gavilea odoratissima*) as well as several taxa with Gondwanan affinities like *Austrocedrus chilensis* (closely related to Australian *Callitris*). The star of the day was definitely the spectacular landscape and the massive ancient Araucarias which dominated the higher areas with an understorey of *Nothofagus pumilio* and *N. antarctica*. We then returned to our cabins at Conguillío for dinner and a good rest.



Conguillio National Park. Photo: N. Contardo

Day 13

Thu 7 November Conguillío National Park to Huilo-Huilo Biological Reserve

After breakfast we left Conguillío National Park to travel to our next destination in the Huilo-Huilo Biological Reserve. Enroute, we encountered 3 Chilean Flickers in a paddock near the road, more Crested Caracara and a Rufous-tailed Plantcutter before arriving for a late 3-course a la carte lunch. We then explored the beautiful and fairytale-like *Nothofagus* forest around our accommodation, having good views of two specialties, the Chucao Tapaculo with its explosive and characteristic voice, and Black-throated Huet-huet in the dense undergrowth next to the walking track. We coincided with a large school group who amazingly and politely waited until we had seen the Tapaculo, and then took pictures of it themselves with their mobile phones. White-tailed Treerunner, Thorn-tailed Rayadito, Austral Thrush and Chilean Mockingbird were also seen. The main plant species we encountered today included Gondwanan relics like *Drimys winteri*, *Laureliopsis philippiana*, *Lomatia ferruginea*, *Eucryphia cordifolia* and massive *Nothofagus alpina* and *Saxethothaea conspicua* trees which all have close affinities with Australian flora. We then headed back to base, exploring the extensive, quirky, building complex, which is uniquely designed around a huge *Nothofagus* trunk, before another massive 3 course evening meal.

Day 14

Fri 8 November Huilo-Huilo Biological Reserve

This morning, we met before breakfast on the roof of the hotel for stunning views of the snow-covered Mocho-Choshuenco volcano and surrounding forest. The Huilo Huilo Biological Reserve, located in the middle of the Chilean Patagonian Rainforest at the foot of the majestic Andes Mountain range. This unique project is committed to the conservation and sustainability of nature and local culture. After breakfast we watched a small group of Austral Parakeets bathing in the overflow of a water feature on the top of one of the buildings before, we explored the botanic trail. We had beautiful views of a young dark morph Black-chested Buzzard-eagle sitting in a large *Eucryphia cordifolia*. After lunch back at the hotel, we visited the Huilo waterfall. Two lizard species were located on the bark of a huge *Nothofagus* tree in the carpark, and we watched a brightly coloured boss male *Liolaemus pictus* assert his dominance by chasing the others and bobbing his head; a *L. tenuis* was also found on the same tree. We then visited Neltume Lake where we saw Kelp Gull, Neotropic Cormorant, Black-faced Ibis and Black Vulture and a nearby forested area where we had good views of an Austral Pygmy Owl, Tufted Tit-tyrant and Fire-eyed Duicon, fleeting glimpses of Des Mur's Wiretail and Green-back Firecrown, and heard both Ochre-flanked and Chucao Tapaculo in the dense bamboo understory, before returning to the grounds of our accommodation for another short walk before dinner. By this time, it had started to rain, curtailing any plans for a night walk tonight.



Austral Pygmy Owl. Photo: W. Kottek

Day 15

Sat 9 November Huilo-Huilo to Puyehue

This morning Black-throated Huet-huet was once again seen on our early morning birdwalk as we continued exploring in the Huilo Huilo Biological Reserve. We then visited the nearby cultural museum to view the exhibits of local Indigenous groups, geology and Southern Chilean culture. We then headed south towards Puyehue, stopping en route for lunch at Lake Panguipulli where we saw Yellow-billed Teal, Pied-billed Grebe, Great Grebe, Red-gartered Coot, Brown-hooded Gull, Kelp Gull, South American Tern, Snowy Egret and Western Cattle Egret, over 400 Black-faced Ibis, and Hellmayr's Pipit. Black Vultures soared in the thermals. Ringed Kingfisher was seen this afternoon on a power line by a river by a few as the bus travelled by but had disappeared by the time we turned back. The landscape here was lush green dairy land carved out of predominantly *Nothofagus obliqua* forest. We arrived at our very grand accommodation at Puyehue late afternoon. As we walked to dinner, we saw a large flock of Slender-billed Parakeets feeding in the Chilean Firetree (*Embothrium coccineum*) in the lodge grounds. We then enjoyed a huge buffet style dinner before retiring to our rooms.

Day 16

Sun 10 November Puyehue National Park

Puyehue National Park which is located in the Andes Mountain Range, in the Los Ríos and Los Lagos regions of Chile formerly referred to as the 10th region. The park boasts 220,000 acres of evergreen forests, surrounded by volcanoes and mountainous landscape with natural thermal springs. Puyehue National Park forms part of the 'Reserve of Temperate Rainy Forest Biospheres of the Southern Andes'.

We first travelled to Aguas Calientes and walked along various tracks and roads in the area where we saw Chilean Pigeon, Chucao Tapaculo, several Austral Thrush and heard Patagonian Tyrant. We then visited Lake Toro where we saw Flying Steamer Duck, Pied-billed Grebe, Neotropic Cormorant and Black-faced Ibis, before heading to a Ski resort at the top of the mountain. By this time, light rain and hail made walking cold and unpleasant so we returned to our accommodation mid-afternoon for a break before heading to dinner and another night at Puyehue.

Day 17

Mon 11 November Lahuen Ñadi Natural Monument to Chiloé Island

Early this morning we left Puyehue to travel to another section of the national park near the Argentinian border, noting the fresh snow coating the mountains from the night before. We then travelled to Lahuen Ñadi National Monument which protects a remnant of mature 1,800-year-old conifers, the Alerce (*Fitzroya cupressoides*) which belongs to the family Cupressaceae and resembles giant Redwoods and Australian *Athrotaxis* (King Billy and Pencil Pines). Here we also saw a new *Nothofagus* species (*N. nitida*), *Podocarpus nubigenus* and beautiful bright pink buds on the *Crinodendron hookerianum*. Chucao Tapaculo was seen in the undergrowth and Patagonia Tyrant once again heard in the tall canopy. We then travelled to Los Muermos for lunch and then took a short ferry ride at La Pasada after checking out the shorebirds and waterbirds, including Black-necked Swan, Peruvian Pelican, Black-crowned Night-heron, Snowy and Great Egret, Red-legged, Imperial and Neotropic Cormorant, Flightless Steamer Duck, Red Shoveler, Chiloé Wigeon, Yellow-billed Teal, Whimbrel, Hudsonian Godwit, Brown-hooded and Kelp Gull and our first Dolphin Gull which was immediately voted prettiest gull by the group. South American Sealion basking on some floating buoys. We then travelled to Pargua near Puerto Montt to embark the ferry across the Chacao Channel to Chiloé Island, where we briefly saw the head of a Magellanic Penguin before it ducked under the water, Sooty and Pink-footed Shearwater, Peruvian Booby, noting both American and Blackish Oystercatcher, South American and Elegant Tern, Turkey Vulture also made another appearance today in addition to White-tailed Kite and an Osprey (a rare sighting for that area) was seen by Wilga at the hotel. We then visited Caulin Bay before travelling to our accommodation in Ancud.

Day 18

Tue 12 November Chiloé Island: Puñihuil, Chepu and Tepuhueico

After an early morning breakfast in our Lodge, we stopped at the foreshore at Ancud, where we saw many Black-necked Swans, Spectacled Duck, Yellow-billed Pintail, Yellow-billed Teal, Great Grebe Red-gartered Coot, American Oystercatcher, over 600 Hudsonian Godwits, Whimbrels, Ruddy Turnstone, Red Knot, many Baird's Sandpipers, Greater Yellowlegs, Franklin's Gull, South American Tern and Peruvian Pelican. We also stopped near a fishing village where we saw a Blackish Oystercatcher stealing bivalves stored by fishermen in nets in the shallows by expertly opening them with its beautifully

adapted beak and another Dolphin Gull at close range. We then took a boat charter in the Puñihuil reserve to a Penguin Colony on some offshore islands where we saw both Humboldt and Magellanic Penguins. Several other marine species such as Kelp Goose (some with goslings), Flightless Steamer Duck, Black-browed Albatross, two Southern Giant Petrels, Sooty and Pink-footed Shearwater, and Magellanic and Imperial Cormorant were seen on the ocean and nesting on the rocks and islands here. We also saw a Marine Otter gliding effortlessly in the kelp zone next to an island, before swimming out to the boat for a quick look at us and then off to an adjoining island to continue its search for some shellfish to eat. After a lunch of huge empanadas, we then visited Chepu, which overlooks the confluence of three rivers and 140 km² of sunken forest (a phenomenon created by the 1960 Valdivia earthquake, which sunk the ground by around 2 metres, allowing salt water to enter the area and kill the trees). Chepu, in the northern sector of Chiloé National Park, remains a sanctuary of pristine beauty. We then took an afternoon river cruise in comfortable open boats along the Chepu River. During the cruise, two Coypu were seen along the vegetation at the riverbank, many nesting Brown-hooded Gulls and Snowy-crowned Terns in vegetation islands in the middle of the river, Snowy and Great Egret and a flock of Slender-billed Parakeets were seen at the end of the cruise. Rufous-tailed Hawk and Grey-flanked Cinclodes seen near Ancud were new birds for the trip. Ringed Kingfisher, Chilean Flicker, Rufous-tailed Plantcutter, Spectacled Tyrant and Fire-eyed Duicon were also seen today. We then travelled to our accommodation in the Tepuhueico Natural Reserve late afternoon. Henry our driver saw a Darwin's Fox next to the buildings on our arrival as he parked the bus, and the rest of the group had great views of a Southern Pudu grazing on the lawn. We all retired to our rooms after dinner, but Nelson snuck out to scout for nightlife and briefly saw a Southern Monito del Monte.



Pudu. Photo: W.Kottek

Day 19

Wed 13 November Tepuhueico Park, Chiloé Island

We spend the day in Tepuhueico Park, a 20,000-hectare privately owned native forest reserve and conservation initiative located in the heart of Chiloé Island which extends from the Pacific Ocean to the shores of Lake Tepuhueico. The Park is located in a transitional zone between the Valdivian and North Patagonian forests and three different forest types are found here: temperate rainforest, conifer forest and swamp forest. The main objective of the park is to actively conserve its natural values and encourage sustainable tourism. We spent the morning walking the Cascade Trail where we saw some giant *Podocarpus nubigenus* conifers; epiphytes, lichens, mosses and fungi abound in the pristine air here and the ancient forest was awe inspiring. The *Weinmannia trichosperma* (a relative of the Tasmanian leatherwood) was in full flower here and the white bottlebrush-like flower spikes emitted a heady fragrance. We walked to the river where we had good views of a Ringed Kingfisher. We then walked to nearby Lake Tepuhueico where we saw a few waterbirds including Yellow-billed Teal and Great Grebe, returning to the lodge for a delicious lunch. We then visited the Catedral de Arrayanes which contains a grove of beautiful large *Luma apiculata* (Arrayanes) and more gnarly, giant *Podocarpus nubigenus*. Here we found the nest of a Green-backed Firecrown and hastily moved on to avoid disturbing the parents who were flitting around it. We heard and eventually saw Darwin's Frog, a critically endangered species males brood the young in its gular (throat) sac until they metamorphose into small frogs. We returned to the lodge for a short rest before dinner, seeing a large flock of Slender-billed Parakeets come into the lodge grounds to roost for the night and then headed out again on a night walk back at the Arrayanes track, returning at 11pm. During the walk we heard a Rufous-legged Owl but weren't lucky with the elusive Monito del Monte.



Ringed Kingfisher. Photo: W.Kottek

Day 20

Thu 14 November Tepuhueico to Puerto Varas

This morning, we left our remote accommodation deep in Tepuhueico Park and travelled back to Ancud to catch the ferry back to the Chilean mainland. Today was mostly a travel day to our destination at Puerto Varas, but we did manage to see a few birds including Black-necked Swan, Chiloe Wigeon, Yellow-billed Teal, American Oystercatcher, Baird's Sandpiper, Neotropic Cormorant and Kelp Gull on the shore near the ferry terminal and heard a Grass Wren at a wetland during a brief stop enroute just before the ferry. South American Tern, Sooty and Pink-footed Shearwater, Imperial Cormorant and Magellanic Penguin seen from the ferry and Grey-flanked Cinclodes, Austral Negrito and White-crested Elaenia, Long-tailed Meadowlark and Correndera Pipit were also seen today. We arrived at our accommodation in Puerto Varas late afternoon. Jenny and Glen saw Saffron Finch on an afternoon walk after check-in which was a new bird for the trip. We then met for our final dinner together as a group this evening.

Patagonia: Day 21

Fri 15 November Puerto Montt and end of main tour

Early this morning, the group met for the last time to say goodbye and wish each other all the best for their onward travels. Margareta was returning home to Australia, Wilga and Jack were flying to Puerto Natales to continue their travels by boat cruise, and Ruth, Glen, Jenny and Tonia were flying to Punta Arenas to join Inala's post tour Patagonia extension to Tierra del Fuego and Torres del Paine. Our new local guide Jurgen and our driver Carlos met us at Puerto Arenas airport on our arrival and transferred us to our accommodation overlooking the beach. We had some free time this afternoon for walking, exploring and resting before we met for dinner.

Day 22

Sat 16 November Punta Arenas and Strait of Magellan Coastal Birding

Today we explored the coast south of Punta Arenas in Chile's far south. Our first stop was at the river estuary at Tres Brazos. This is also the wettest area of Chile and a transition zone between deciduous and evergreen forest. We first walked in a deciduous forest comprised of huge *Nothofagus pumilio* and a new species to us, *N. betuloides*. We birded along the edge of the river, picking up Crested Duck, Spectacled Duck with ducklings, Chiloe Wigeon, and Yellow-billed Pintail, Black-faced Ibis and several Southern Lapwings. We also had great views of a Ringed Kingfisher perched on a bare branch next to the river. In the forest, we saw a pair of White-throated Treerunners working the side of a huge *Nothofagus*; Dark-bellied Cinclodes, Thorn-tailed Rayadito, House Wren, Austral Thrush, Black-chinned Siskin, Patagonia Sierra Finch and White-crested Elaenia were also seen, and Austral Parakeets flew overhead. One of the highlights was being surrounded on most of this walk in the forest by hundreds of

Chilean Swallows who buzzed around us in quite dense flocks, stopping briefly to rest on bare branches, before resuming their flight- quite magical! The Magellanic forest is well known for a variety of geese, and we saw Upland, Ashy-headed and the critically endangered Ruddy-headed Goose together here. We then drove to the southernmost point of the Pan-American Highway that one can reach by car in Chile to investigate some evergreen forest nearby where *Nothofagus betuloides* dominated, which was mostly only accessible from the beach. This was an area that Darwin visited on his exploration here and who also commented on the impenetrable forest at this location. As we returned to the vehicle from our second walk, we were astounded to see a beautiful Southern Red Fox (*Culpeo*) trot up to us expectantly looking for food. Such a gorgeous animal in fantastic condition, which left disappointed as handouts weren't forthcoming. Today we also drove slowly along the road adjoining the shore looking seaward, where we saw the characteristic fins of Peale's Dolphin breaking the water not far from shore. Then an excited cry of 'spout' from the group as we spotted a pod of five Sei Whale cruising by, again not far from shore. We had fantastic views of the top half of their body dipping below the water and reappearing through our binoculars before they headed further offshore. Black-browed Albatross were also cruising close to shore, and we were clearly able to see their identifying features, including the underwing pattern through binoculars. We also had good views of Flying Steamer-duck, Magellanic Oystercatcher, Baird's Sandpiper, Kelp Gull, South American Tern, Southern Giant Petrel, Southern Fulmar, Magellanic and Imperial Cormorants and Black-crowned Night-heron on the beach. Another great find was a Magellanic Snipe which was standing on a small rock calling in full view-an amazing opportunity to see this normally cryptic species at close range. Crested and Chimango Caracara were also seen today, as were several Austral Negritos. We returned to our accommodation late in the afternoon and then walked to a nearby restaurant for a delicious dinner (and the best Pisco Sours on the trip – actually a version of the cocktail with Calafate berries from the local *Berberis* bushes – delicious!).



Ruddy Headed, Ashy Headed and Upland Geese. Photo: T.Cochran

Day 23

Sun 17 November Tierra del Fuego and King Penguin colony

This morning, we were scheduled to take an early morning ferry crossing to Porvenir, the main town on the Chilean side of the mythical island Tierra del Fuego at the 'end of the world'. However strong winds and rough seas delayed our departure for 4 hours. We made use of the time by birding from the departure point, nabbing Southern Giant-petrel, Black-browed Albatross and Southern Fulmar flying out to sea, and Flying Steamer-duck and Imperial Cormorant roosting on a partly submerged jetty nearby which they seem to have commandeered as their own. After a long wait we finally boarded the ferry, heading up to the passenger lounge for the 2+ hour trip over. On the ferry crossing we added Magellanic Diving-petrel, South American Tern, Sooty Shearwater and Chilean Skua. We then headed straight to a King Penguin colony at Bahía Inútil (the northernmost limit of this species at 53° latitude). Despite the fearsome wind, we had a fantastic time viewing these beautiful stately birds as they went about their daily business-waddling into the colony from the shore, pair bonding with a series of head bobbing and beak clacking and fighting over females with a deal of flipper flapping, while some huge fluffy brown young watched on or slept, looking like befeater hats. We also looked hopefully at holes made by Magellanic Tuco-Tuco, another burrowing rodent, but they didn't show today, so we left and headed to our accommodation, watching large numbers of dark-faced Guanacos in the fields and stopping for a new bird species, Short-billed Miner, which breeds on the Patagonian steppe. We had dinner at our hotel which was also hosting another large birding group and then headed to bed. Some of the group saw a South American Grey Fox (Chilla) around the buildings near our rooms.



King Penguins. Photo: T.Cochran

Day 24

Mon 18 November Exploring the Patagonian Steppes

After breakfast this morning we headed to a ferry on the northern tip of Terra del Fuego that would take us over the Strait of Magellan that the locals call 'The Narrows' to the continental mainland. We scanned the Patagonian Steppe en route, admiring the herds of Guanaco. On our arrival we birded along the shore while waiting for the ferry, adding Chiloe Wigeon, White-rumped and Baird's Sandpiper, Hudsonian Godwit, Lesser Yellowlegs and Wilson's Phalarope, before taking the 30-minute crossing. Jenny spotted a Commerson's Dolphin, and we picked up Great Grebe, Magellanic Cormorant and Kelp Gull during the trip. After disembarking the ferry, we headed to a lagoon where Jurgen does regular bird surveys in search of the threatened Magellanic Plover, a monotypic shorebird related to the sheathbills, which is endemic to Patagonia and listed as Threatened by IUCN, with an estimated population of around 330 mature individuals. We had missed the opportunity to look for this species yesterday because of the delay with the ferry, but had great success today, picking up a pair of these lovely little birds with bright pink legs that somewhat resemble small pigeons, in the scope and watching them feeding for some time. We then explored a grassy area with small bushes nearby, picking up two species that breed in the Patagonian Steppe-Cinnamon-bellied Ground-tyrant and Patagonian Yellow-finch. We also saw our first *Calceolaria uniflora* here, a slipperwort which has striking gold, white and burgundy flowers up to 5cm (2 inches) long at ground level. This ornithophilic (bird-pollinated) plant is pollinated by Least Seedsnipe, which eats the conspicuous, sugar-rich, white appendage and in doing so transfers pollen from one flower to another. We saw a male Least Seedsnipe with its characteristic black breast 'tie' shortly afterwards. The next big challenge was Patagonian Tinamou, a cryptic and seldom-seen member of an ancient group of birds closely related to ratites. We couldn't believe our eyes when we saw one running from quite near the road and on exiting the vehicle to have another view, we flushed another one. We had good views in the scope and then left them in peace in case they had a nest nearby. Other species we found in this area included Scale-throated Earthcreeper, Grey-hooded Sierra Finch, Correndera Pipit, Darwin's (Lesser) Rhea, and Tawny-throated Dotterel which is the only living member of its genus. A beautiful Southern Grey Fox (*Chilla*) was observed sniffing around near the road as we passed. We also visited a wetland where we saw Plumbeous Rail, Red-gartered and White-winged Coot, White-tufted Grebe and Brown-hooded Gull. We also saw Barn Swallow here for the first and only time during the trip. We did well for raptors today, with Cinereous Harrier, Variable Hawk, American Kestrel, Aplomado Falcon, Crested and Chimango Caracara and Black-chested Buzzard-eagle being seen today in addition to great views of soaring Andean Condor late in the afternoon. Our destination for this afternoon was Cerro Castillo where we would spend the next two nights.



Correndera Pipet. Photo: T.Cochran

Day 25

Tue 19 November Pumas and Torres del Paine

We had a very early start this morning, leaving just after 4am to travel to a huge 7,000ha private property near la Laguna Amarga to scout for Pumas, which are most active just after dawn and late afternoon. We met our local guides Juan Pablo (JP) and Angelo at a carpark just outside the property and climbed aboard their 4WD vehicles, bumping over the tracks to look for signs of Pumas. JP got out of the car and scouted around, and the call of 'Puma' came across the UHF radio. We saw a brief view of a huge male Puma loping towards some rocks and as we manoeuvred around, we identified the dominant male "Dark", whose nature suited his name, settle in behind some rocks to sleep the day away. He watched us lazily before dropping his head to have a snooze. As there would be no more Puma action until the afternoon, we left him in peace to sleep and then explored a bit further, getting great views of a lesser Horned (Magellanic) Owl roosting in a small bush. The wildflowers here were also gorgeous, with *Calceolaria uniflora*, *Alstroemeria patagonica*, and yellow *Viola* groundcovers amongst the rocky terrain. We then decided to head into the incomparable and breathtaking Torres del Paine National Park. While the park is most famous for its astonishing scenery, it is also rich in birds and mammals. Our first stop was the glacial Paine River to look for Torrent Ducks, which we picked up expertly paddling amongst the rapids and sitting on isolated exposed rocks amongst the swirling waters. We had lunch at a hotel in the park overlooking Pehoé Lake and then explored a bit more, nabbing Great Grebe and also seeing Rufous-banded Miner, Buff-winged Cinclodes, White-browed Ground-tyrant, Fire-eyed Duicon and Grey-bellied Shrike-tyrant, returning to our rendezvous point to meet our guides for another session at 16:30. While waiting, we saw Sharp-billed Canastero. We once again patrolled some likely spots and soon found a large herd of Guanacos, one with a newborn calf that had been born that day and was

the first the guides had seen that season. We waited near them a short while before noticing all their heads turned in the same direction somewhere behind the vehicle, shortly followed by panicked bleating. We turned around to see a female Puma who the guides identified as 'Petaca', sauntering in, probably attracted by the smell of the newborn calf. The Guanacos scattered and disappeared, and the Puma roamed around the area, smelling their scent and barely noticing our presence as we got out of the car and stood in a group observing her. She came quite close and then started calling, perhaps to her two kittens, before walking off to have a drink at a nearby lake. We were in the process of following her when we noticed another Puma silhouette on the escarpment. This was soon identified as a past daughter of Petaca called 'Amarga' a gorgeous grey-coloured female who made the same circuit as her mother. We left her in peace and headed back to our accommodation in Cerro Castillo, elated and feeling extremely privileged at the close encounters with these sleek, gorgeous animals.



Puma. Photo: T.Cochran

Day 26

Wed 20 November Sierra Baguales and Torres del Paine

This morning, we elected to have a slightly later start and considering yesterday's outstanding success, instead of more Puma tracking, we headed to another striking range of mountains, Sierra Baguales, a brooding, isolated volcanic range which is home to herds of 'bagual' or wild horses. Although we didn't see any of those today, the scenery was breathtaking and the fiery red and orange of *Anarthrophyllum* bushes in full bloom striking against the green of the hills and craggy rocks. Cinereous Harrier and Andean Condor were two raptor highlights and Rufous-tailed Plantcutter and Patagonian Mockingbird were new birds for this section of the tour. We also looked for Patagonian (Large) Haired Armadillo but all we could manage was a road killed individual – fascinating regardless. We stopped along the roadside at an interesting rock formation which contained some beautiful marine fossils dating from the early Miocene about 23 million years ago when this area was a marine environment. We then took a walk through a *Nothofagus pumilio* forest on the eastern side of Torres del Paine National Park where we saw 6 Silvery Grebes in a water hole at the start of the track. We also visited the beautiful Cascada

del Rio Paine waterfall, before meeting up once again with JP and Angelo for another late afternoon Puma tracking session. Our group split into two vehicles, and we went our separate ways on the huge property. One Puma was found but we decided to leave her in peace, having had such a good view the day before. We instead concentrated on studying the Guanaco herds, one group seeing some mating activity, and the other a brutal fight between two males, which resulted in the original male losing most of his herd to an incoming upstart. A Least Seedsnipe flew in front of the vehicle showing its remarkable resemblance in flight to shorebirds. We then returned to our accommodation in Cerro Castillo for a late dinner before packing and heading to bed for our last night in Chile.



Landscape. Photo: T.Cochran

Day 27

Thu 21 November Punta Arenas to Santiago and depart

We left very early this morning to drive to Punta Arenas airport where we connected with our flight back to Santiago. Ruth was to continue exploring in Chile and the rest of the group headed back to Australia. This marked the end of a fantastic trip, covering almost the entire length of Chile and seeing an amazing range of birds, wildlife and plants. Throughout the trip, 224 species of birds, 26 mammal species and 11 species of reptiles and amphibians were recorded. Thanks to everyone involved – the guides and drivers who worked so hard and the interest and good company of the group members.



On behalf of Inala - thanks for touring with us.

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