

The logo for viranatura tours features the word "viranatura" in a large, black, serif font, with "tours" in a smaller, black, sans-serif font below it. To the right of the text is a stylized black icon of a plant with three leaves and a central stem.

viranatura  
tours

The title "CHILE TRIP REPORT" is written in a large, white, serif font, with "2019" in a smaller, white, serif font below it. The text is set against a background of a rocky, grassy hillside under a blue sky with light clouds.

CHILE TRIP REPORT  
2019

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**Day 1            22 Nov            To Chile**

Chile is a fair way from many places and we all made our way there from various points – Vancouver Island, Minnesota, Hawaii, Germany and Istanbul – quite a spread. We all met up in Santiago airport and took our internal flight a long way north to Arica, arriving at night so the morning was to be a surprise.

**Day 2            23 Nov            Arica to Putre**

Our hotel was right on the coast and daybreak saw foamy breakers pounding the rocks where thousands of seabirds and shorebirds were settled. It was quite a sight and every so often flock of a few hundred would take off a whirr around, be it Elegant Terns, Willets or an incoming squadron of hefty Peruvian Pelicans. There were also Surfbirds, Ruddy Turnstones, Whimbrel, Band-tailed Gulls sleek-looking Grey Gulls.

After we'd dealt with shopping we began a trip inland, heading along the flat green valley bottom, flanked by immense sandy walls bereft of vegetation. This stark contrast was reinforced from a viewpoint which showed the emerald streak of life amidst the bone dry desert. Our road climbed higher, and the landscape became grander with canyons and colourful slopes. Then the first plants were seen, and clearly there had been rain earlier this year as there were more plants than normal with a bushy *Nolana sp.*, a trailing *Caesalpinia sp.* and ruby red domes of *Cistanthe celasoides*. Moving on there were big plants of yellow *Solanum chilense*, the steely-lilac of *Tarasa operculata* and a tuft of pink *Verbena gynobasis*. Lunch was near some fine specimens of *Browningia candellaris*, a striking cactus with very spiny trunks, from which spread octopoid spineless limbs. Another gully had many more *Cistanthe celasoides*, as well as a couple of *Exodecodon flavum* with a few yellow trumpets and a *Trichocline sp.* On the dry slopes were untidy mounds of *Cumulopuntia sphaerica*. A big spread of *Exodecodon flavum* was found a bit further on with a much larger *Verbena gynobasis*.

There was a stop for a canyon viewpoint and then it was on to Putre arriving just as a rare rain shower swept in. This was short-lived and once it had cleared both Chilean Woodstar and Andean Hillstar were seen flying about the hotel grounds.



Elegant Terns

The first of many stops was to look at the many cushions of *Verbena gymnobasis* that grew along the roadside. Looking back to Putre we could see the fresh snows on the Nevados de Putre beyond and both Greenish Yellow Finch and Mourning Sierra Finch were around. Then we stopped for various delights finding *Solanum pulchellum*, our first *Mutisia acuminata*, a carmine flower of *Oreocereus leucotrichus*, sprouting from amidst a mass of wool and long yellow spines and then a bush of *Senna birostris* dripping with golden flowers. Next to this were a few of the common *Balbisia microphylla* and low-growing *Adesmia atacamensis*. Turning off the main road we climbed into the hills and followed a serpentine road through a wonderful landscape with views off into the distant coloured hills and canyons. Our next stops found big bushes of *Dunalia spinosa* dripping with purple tubular flowers. Another view point also had an interesting cacti-clad slope with several species including the ubiquitous *Oreocereus leucotrichus*, its rather unattractive relative *Corryocactus brevistylus* and a triumvirate of low growing species with wonderful domes of *Cumulopuntia boliviana* subsp. *echinacea*, the ultra-spiny *C. sphaerica* and *Tunilla chilensis*, with flattened pads and pink infused yellow flowers. We took lunch here and then set off further along the road seeing another superb mound of *Cumulopuntia sp* and some big plants of *Mutisia acuminata* with a few decent flowers on. Below these were more good *Tunilla chilensis* in flower and we observed a little grey bee pollinating the them. Driving on, our route passed through tracts of *Polylepis* forest and then a rocky bank where the scrambling stems of *Caiophora cirsiifolia* dangled scarlet flowers from spiny stems. Not far from here was the best specimen of *Mutisia acuminata* we had seen, the exploding rocket flowers in excellent condition.

An adult and juvenile Variable Hawk were seen well and then a small stream and seep was lined with huge clumps of *Cortaderia chilensis* with their tall silvered plumes looking great against the



*Verbena gymnobasis*

moody grey sky. In the marshy ground was plenty of *Mimulus depressus* and the adjacent dry ground had *Bidens andicola*. There was time for one more plant stop before the rain arrived and it was a good one with the best mounds of *Verbena gynobasis* we had seen including some fine deep pink colour forms. The rain didn't really last long and by the time we arrived back it was fine and dry. The final botany of the day was on a dry hillside with two interesting plants the coppery flowered *Chuziriaga spinosa* and the lovely red *Mutisia hamata*. A solitary *Calceolaria inamoena* was seen growing out of a bank.

**Day 4            25 Nov            Parque Nacional Lauca**

Having spent a day acclimatising, today we headed to higher altitudes and began with a colony of the lovely *Lupinus oreophilus* at a mere 4050 metres. These grew on a bare slope with young plants of *Parastrephia lepidophylla*. The sun shone beautifully through the mauve-blue spikes of the lupines. Gaining another 300 metres we stopped beside a rocky slope and opposite a large green bofedale bog. On the slope were some superb (and huge) mounds of *Azorella compacta*, that oozed over rocks and formed the most remarkable organic structures. Flat mats of *Pycnophyllum bryoides* grew everywhere too. And near the road we also found the fleshy rosettes of *Nastanthus* sp. with flat mats of an unidentifiable verbenaceae peppered with pale pink flowers.

A bit higher still and we pulled into an area of bog and rock piles where we found the cute and furry Mountain Viscacha sunning themselves or nibbling on bog plants. Around the bog itself were mats of *Werneria aretoides* and the dense bog sedges were sprinkled with *Gentiana prostrata*. A Puna Ground-tyrant was seen along with two handsome Andean Geese and other mat-forming bog plants included *Senecio algens*. Across the road the bare, sandy slopes had the delightful crinkled rosettes of *Nototriche pulverulenta*. The landscapes a bit further up were superb with more bogs and grazing Vicunas, different *Senecio* species and crazily tame viscachas.

Storm clouds were gathering around Volcan Parinacota, but we managed to enjoy lunch in the sunshine. In the nearby pools were Andean Geese, Crested Duck, Andean Negrito and Puna Ibis, whilst a Mountain Caracara flew across as we were photographing a superb specimen of *Caiophora rosulata* wedged into a shady rock



*Caiophora rosulata*

crevice. Mounds of *Azorella compacta* were also abundant if not quite as large as the others we had seen. Another pond had Giant Coot, Puna Teal and Puna Ibis, but by now the greying skies were rumbling and firing lightning bolts. The quaint little church at Parinacota village was photographed as bolts shot down around and hail began to bounce, picking up quickly and coating the landscape in icy drifts. We tried to grin and bear it, driving on to look for birds, but finding only Andean Gulls and cold. Retreating, the weather eased and we stopped by an area of bogland with several ponds in which, fed both Chilean and Andean Flamingos. Herds of alpacas were grazing alongside a few Vicuna too. Another pond had more Giant Coot and Speckled Teal and then a handsome Andean Flicker appeared, eventually flying off to where we saw Bar-winged Cinclodes along the shore.

Our early return had its rewards. Nearing Putre on the back road we stopped in a wonderful area of golden grasses with fine landscapes around us and enjoyed a wander among this before heading back.

**Day 5            26 Nov            Salar de Surire**

A spectacular day, with non-stop stunning landscapes. The bad weather of yesterday was just a memory, this morning was crystal clear with perfect views of the towering Volcan Parinacota, reflected in the roadside lakes. There was still lots of fresh snow on the higher peaks adding to the drama. Turning off the 'main road' we drove across remote country through areas of countless peaked clumps of *Festuca orthophylla*, with the huge Volcan Guillatire looming in the background. A large ginger dome of *Cumulopuntia boliviana* subsp. *ignescens* was found with three bright red flowers and there was a long stop for an interesting area of *Azorella compacta* and mats of *Pynophyllum bryoides* with the ever impressive landscape beyond. There were also (and would be all day) plenty of Vicuna wandering about, as well as increasing numbers of their woollier cousins - Alpacas.

We pushed on to the large Salar de Surire salt lake and made our way around to an area close to the lake from where we could see hundreds of flamingos milling about in the reflective shallows. Two Mountain Caracaras soared overhead as we continued to another side lagoon, which contained all three



*Azorella compacta*

flamingo species together - Chilean, Andean and Puna (Jame's) - for easy comparison. On the far side of the salt lake a rough track took us up to a fascinating area of sparse *Polylepis tarapacana* woodland, the trees, which possibly centuries old, were swathed in peeling papery reddish bark. Around them were many more *Azorella compacta* and also a new cushion species *Pycnophyllum macropetalum*. We completed our circuit of the lake, also seeing Puna Tinamou a couple of times, and then rumbled back, stopping for some colourful 'badlands' and other views as the lowering sun made the orangey domes of *Cumulopuntia* stand out in the vast expanse of puna.

A final night of Andean cuisine and hilarious music videos ensued.

**Day 6**            **27 Nov**            **Los Molles**

We set off very early and drove down to Arica, though Chilean roadworks did their level best to prevent us getting there on time. The airport was manic and not all of us managed to get a morning coffee. Nonetheless, the plane was on time into Santiago. Car hire went okay, but a sudden rush at the left luggage (where I had left the books) meant a short delay. But then we were off, stopping at a good service station for lunch before continuing north as far as the wonderfully named Pichidangui. Here we spent time around a rock outcrop with big spreading plants of *Puya venusta*, some showing their blue flowers. Both *Eriosyce chilensis* and *Echinopsis chiloensis* were also on the rocks, but the latter were much larger on the ground. Also nearby was a huge old inflorescence of *Puya bertroniana* (a plant we would see in flower later) and its much larger viciously-spined leaf rosettes. It is fair to say it seemed to be a very dry season (in fact it was the driest for fifty years) and some plants were not on show. Other such as *Lobelia polyphylla* had made the effort regardless and had heads of deep red flowers. Despite the drought, one plant bursting out of the dry ground in good number was *Rhodophiala advena*, the flowers varying from salmon-pink to orange.

Our final stop of the day was not far down the road, the delightful stretch of rocky coast at Los Molles. Here the waves crashed onto rocky bluffs crowded with big clumps of *Cistanthe grandiflora* with their intense magenta flowers held aloft. Other rocks were draped in great masses of *Nolana sedifolia* and here and there appeared the stunning *Alstroemeria pelegrina*, one of the most flamboyant of all Chilean species. A Giant Humming bird put in an appearance feeding along the shore and there were Neotropical Cormorants, Blackish Oystercatchers and a couple of Snowy Egrets fishing in the tide pools.



*Alstroemeria pelegrina*

Our hotel was tucked away in a peaceful location with its own lake that attracted Red-gartered Coot, Chilean Swallow and Black Vultures perched on the roof. There were also boughs of the red-flowered parasite *Tristerix corymbosa* hanging from the poplars in the garden.

Our first stop reinforced the how dry conditions were with not a sign of the normally abundant *Alstroemeria pulchra* that I usually find there. However, the exotic-looking *Lobelia excelsa* was in flower with its long orange flowers. We eventually found a supermarket to stock up on and then drove towards La Campana, but never quite made it. A fabulous cactus garden drew suitable ooh and aahs, and a quick phone call to the owner got us inside where he gave us a guided tour. It was a remarkable creation that blended superb cactus and succulent specimens with some equally superb art and quirky touches using metal and whatever else had appealed. The owner's son was the metalworker and he even showed us a secret collection underground and wonderful textured pieces combining metal and stone.

This impromptu visit meant it was too late to start our walk, so we had lunch first instead. Luckily, Chilean Palms (*Jubaea chilensis*) are not bothered by drought and many of the huge plants we saw must have experienced their fair share. We climbed up the trail seeing flowering *Echinopsis chiloensis* and several other plants of the same bearing the red fruits of the parasite *Tristerix aphylla*, a species that specialises in cacti. Glancing down slope we could also see a bluish spike of *Puya bertroniana* and planned to try for that on the way back.

We reached a grove of giant palms with impressive girths, the swollen trunks having a wonderful texture too. Returning to the car park we took another trail that more or less went straight to the impressive *Puya bertroniana*, a masterpiece of botanical art with a towering three metre spike bearing hundreds of turquoise flowers. From among the flowers long stems protruded and these are bird perches designed to help their pollinators of choice, and several different species of bird will attend puyas.

From the park we drove to an hour to the east where we stopped in an area with abundant silvery-leaved *Puya coerulea*, another superb species of this genus of quintessential Chilean bromeliads. The road climbed a lot higher and we stopped in an area with flowering *Eriosyce curvispina* that grew amidst matorral scrub that included the architectural and very spiny *Colletia armata*. There was also a flash of red from *Rhodophiala splendens* and then a solitary *Alstroemeria angustifolia* that had braved the dry. Our last stop was for a population of *Chloraea bletioides*, our first orchid, the white and green flowers embellished with pronounced ridges of specialised calli. A little further up the road was also a thriving bush of *Solanium ligusticum* – there was water somewhere.



*Jubaea chilensis*

Day 8

29 Nov

Portillo

Heading out we could soon see the layered ridges of the Andes rising up in front of us. We drove more or less directly up to Portillo at 2900 metres, negotiating the many trucks heading for Argentina and the many switchbacks of an incredible road up into the mountains. The day was perfect with clear blue skies reflected in the azure waters of Lago Inca when we arrived. Our route took us up through rocky alpine areas where some of the lovely *Viola atropurpurea* were found including a lovely yellow form. As we progressed there were the 'squashed broccoli' rosettes of *Nastanthus spathulatus*, sprawling little bushes of scented *Berberis empetrifolia* and spreading flat plants of yellow *Sanicula graveolens*. Then reaching higher scree we found more superb *Viola atropurpurea*, with some clumps comprising over twenty heads. Most were beset with several deep purple flowers, the outer petals embellished with white protrusions. As we photographed them we saw a good sized bumble bee attended the flowers. A little further over was another species, *Viola montagnei*, with woolly rosettes and equally deep purple flowers, that lacked the white protrusions. Good time was spent enjoying these special plants in their spectacular mountain setting, and then on the way down we found a few *Olsynium junceum* and had another look at the beautiful yellow form of *Viola atropurpurea* that Suzan had found.

It was already becoming windy up at Portillo so we descended a bit to a more sheltered place for lunch. Despite its less than salubrious appearance our lunch spot had some fine flowers with both exotic-looking *Schizanthus hookeri* and the trailing stems of *Tropaeolum polyphyllum* with heads of golden flowers. Our first stop after lunch had many big domes of *Calceolaria hypericina*, both white and pink forms of *Montiopsis xxx* and upright *Astragalus looseri*. Dropping down further we stopped in a rocky area where despite the dry year we found the lovely scarlet daisies of *Mutisia subulata* trailing over the vegetation, alongside yellow or peachy *Eriosyce curvispina*, the odd white *Mutisia acerosa* and the golden drumsticks of *Quinchimalium dombeyi*. A little further over were some superb *Malesherbia linearifolia* with violet star flowers on tall stems.



*Viola atropurpurea*



**Day 9**      **30 Nov**      **To Vilches**

Today was about repositioning to get us a lot further south. So we drove out of Limache and sped via the Chile's fast road network to and around Santiago, stopping for a coffee break once we'd cleared the urban sprawl. Lunch was an hour later and then after gathering picnic supplies in Molina we were able to start looking at plants. First up was a mixed population of *Alstroemeria ligtu* with colours varying from pink or peach to pure white or yellow. Above grew bushy plants of *Calceolaria thyrsofolia* and *Cestrum parqui*.

Further down the road a flashes of gold revealed tall *Chloraea chrysantha* beside the road together with plenty of blue shooting stars – *Conanthera bifolia*, various pink shades of *Clarkia tenella* and deep blue *Pasithea coerulea*. Another area of matorral had a good stand of *Chloraea galeata*. Then we moved on into an mixed area of woodland and matorral where we found the lovely golden-yellow *Chloraea lamellata*, alongside plentiful scrambling *Bomarea salsilla* and short turf with abundant *Haplopappus macrocephalus*. Three species of yellow *Calceolaria* grew around about with *C. integrifolia*, *C. glandulosa* and *C. thyrsofolia*, whilst the many bushes of *Sophora macrocarpa* were heavy with seed pods.

Heading for the hotel we saw lots of orange *Alstroemeria ligtu* along the roadside, but they would have to wait until tomorrow. Our accommodation was beautifully located with woodland with Green-backed Firecrews zipping about the feeders and Austral Parakeets flying overhead.

**Day 10**      **1 Dec**      **Siete Tazas**

The hummingbirds were busy first thing in the morning, fuelling up for the day ahead. And after we had done the same we set off, rumbling back down the dirt roads to Siete Tazas. There was a short stop for the bridal veil falls, though most of us found the huge climbing specimen of *Hydrangea serratifolia* more interesting! Moving onto the park we quickly prepared our packed lunches and then started on the walk. There were flowery bushes of *Fabiana imbricata* in both cream and mauve forms as well as abundant *Ribes triloba*. Entering the cool of the forest a purple *Corynabutilon ceratocarpum* was in good flower. A succession of little treats followed with *Cissarobryon elegans*, a yellow *Oxalis valdiviense* and some fine *Alstroemeria ligtu*. Further along was a lovely rusty-red *Salpiglossis sinuata* and at one point the path sides were sprinkled with the rosettes of *Viola subandina*. A couple of necklaces of *Tropaeolum tricolor* were laced across the shrubs



*Rhodophiala splendens*

shortly before we reached a quite peculiar patch of plants. In one location we found the pretty pink *Calceolaria cana* growing with the cactus *Eriosyce curvispina*, *Chusquea coleou* bamboo, *Austrocedrus chilensis*, *Nothofagus dombeyi* and a few *Puya berteroniana*. Some of the cacti were in good flower too. But it was the improbable association of plants that made this so unusual.

Walking on there were larger specimens of *Nothofagus dombeyi* and then two magnificent *Austrocedrus chilensis*. More open sunny patches had many finished orchids, but two fascinating green ones were in full flower, with the peculiar *Chloraea bipinnula* (an all green insect mimic complete with shiny eyes inside) and the scented *C. viridiflora*. Reaching the river and falls that rushed with crystal clear water, we descended to a stony bund where there were a good number of the white-flowered *Viola farkasiana*, with lovely rosettes of soft leaves. It was an ideal place for lunch.

Heading back we made good time, only interrupted by Suzan's prize find of a superb rich-red *Rhodophiala splendens*. The perfect way to round off an enjoyable walk. There was still time for a quick visit to the Siete Tazas, a series of seven stone bowls eroded into the basalt column river bed, with one pouring into another. Close by were also three *Chloraea lechleri* to give a final botanical twist. It seemed half of Chile was leaving the area as we drove back in clouds of dust and then rattled back to blessed tarmac and our pleasant base.

**Day 11      2 Dec      To Antucalhue**

Another move further south. The morning drive took us down the Pan-American highway to an area of pine plantation with some fine specimens of *Chloraea crispa*, a beautiful pure white (most of the time) orchid. On the forest edge were also a few *Alstroemeria angustifolia* in good flower.

Following a short visit to the Salto del Laja waterfall we drove onto a second, more diverse orchid site. Here there was plentiful *Chloraea barbata* in the grassy areas, including an area of native grassland with various bunch grasses and curly *Stipa*. Good patches of *Haplopappus macrocephalus* were also here with the now familiar blue shooting stars of *Conanthera bifolia*. However, in the adjacent forest stand was a remarkable mix of species and hybrids, including one spot where *Chloraea barbata*,



*Chloraea crispa*

*C. bidentata* and *C. stenantha* grew together. These three species had produced an array of hybrids with intermediate characters to make the whole assemblage quite confusing unless you knew what was going on.

The last stretch of the drive brought us within sight of the impressive dark cone of Volcan Antuco, heavily streaked with snow and our accommodation was nestled among this magnificence.

**Day 12      3 Dec      Laguna del Laja**

A superb day. It began with a stretch of road lined with small waterfalls, which was crammed with all sorts of moisture-loving plants including the impressive *Gunnera tinctoria*, cascading masses of yellow *Mimulus luteus*, *Fuchsia magellanica*, dripping with cerise flowers, an abundance of luxuriant *Blechnum chilense* ferns, as well as bushes of *Buddleja globosa* and *Solanum crispum*. Our next stop was also for something that preferred a little dampness around its' roots – *Nierembergia repens* – a pretty spreader with white trumpet flowers that formed patches in the short turf. The attractive winged seedpods of *Trichoglochin alatum* colour deep pink as they age and our stop for this also produced two soaring Andean Condors.

Reaching the large Laguna del Laja we ventured onto a flowery slope with bushy mounds of bicoloured *Lathyrus multiceps*, deep pink *Vicia nigricans* and golden *Senna arnottiana*. Higher up were both *Calceolaria corymbosa* subsp. *montana* and *C. penellii*, but it seemed we had missed our chance of *Chloraea alpina*. However, as we came back down Philipp spotted a lone, golden spike of this handsome orchid. On an adjacent slope near the lake were spectacular, floriferous mounds of *Calceolaria andina* that offered a truly jarring contrast to the black lava they grew among.

Lunch was closer to the lake among the rocks and where the surrounding ash had many *Viola farkasiana*. But this was just an introduction, for when we walked higher onto the volcanic slopes there was a great many more. Here they were joined with their larger cousin, the much showier *V. cotyledon*, as well as big mats of *Maihuenia poeppigii* and clumps of *Anemone multifida*. Plenty of time was spent exploring this unusual habitat, but there was time afterwards to drive a different viewpoint of the lake and then visit a huge specimen of *Maihuenia poeppigii* with dozens of open flowers and hundreds of red buds. Tiny, fast-moving black-grey bees were diving into the flowers. There were more condor views too as we drove back to the comforts of our cabins.



*Lathyrus multiceps*

**Day 13**      **4 Dec**      **To Villarrica**

The morning was about driving as we repositioned ourselves again for the southernmost areas we would visit. We were treated to clear views of Volcan Villarrica well before we reached the town and it remained a picture-postcard peak through the afternoon. Lunch was in view of its snows with plenty of appropriately fiery *Embothrium coccineum* in the foreground. Continuing up to the higher slopes we had a walk across the awakening alpine slopes. The season was bit late, but we still found the odd *Viola cotyledon* (in flower) and the lovely crinkled cushions of *Nassauvia lagascae*. A Southern Caracara showed well as did a pair of Ochre-naped Ground-tyrants.

Lower down among the southern beech forests (mainly *Nothofagus pumilio*) we found some lovely flowering shrub combinations with orange *Berberis trigona* mixing with *B. montana* and *Ovidia andina*. These appeared again when we stopped for the dainty orchid *Codonorchis lessonii*, which grew in woods with plenty of *Quinchimalium dombeyi*. A female Magellanic Woodpecker was seen quite well too.

**Day 14**      **5 Dec**      **Parque Nacional Villarrica**

A lovely sunny day in the mountains. The first stop for a colony of *Chloraea virescens* also produced the pretty shrub, *Ugni molinae*. However, few shrubs hold a candle to the fire of *Embothrium coccineum* and we stopped at a particularly dazzling bank of these. Around them grew *Fragaria chilensis*, *Nothofagus alpina* and *Solanum valdivianum*. Reaching the start of our walk we were confronted by our first (impressive) *Araucaria araucana* that stood sentry beside the lake, immense umbrellas of spidery spiny limbs. Our walk was to be through a mixed forest of these and *Nothofagus pumilio*, but we started with more orchids with the tall and lovely *Gavilea odoratissima* and then the incomparable *Chloraea magellanica* - the porcelain orchid - a celebration of orchid subtlety and fine patterns. Alongside the stream were the intense red tubular flowers of *Ourisia ruelloides*, and the paths were lined with *Viola maculata* (pointed leaf-tips), abundant *Quinchimalium chilensis* and *Vicia nigricans*, as well as occasional flowering bushes of *Berberis montana* and *B. trigona*.



*Chloraea magellanica*

The *Araucaria* grew ever more impressive as we walked (also seeing Striped Woodpecker on the way), eventually reaching a grove that framed the imposing bulk of 3800-metre Volcan Lanin. At another location, tucked in the forest we found a superb little colony of *Rhodophiala andicola*, the deep pink trumpets enhanced with dark throats. A tarantula was found on the way back down.

Lunch was in a pleasant spot surrounded by big araucarias. Another big stand of these iconic conifers also held many more *Chloraea magellanica* (including one with a possible pollinator), all with a superb volcano backdrop. There was one stop as we drove down to photograph the diminutive *Calceolaria tenella* that grew amidst immense *Gunnera tinctoria* leaves. We were also told about the dangers of mice in bamboo by passing rangers!

We arrive back in time for some retail therapy in town.

**Day 15          6 Dec          Parque Nacional Conguillio**

For once a cloudy start, and at first it seemed as though we'd have to endure a grey day. Wending our way through the Chilean countryside a Ringed Kingfisher was perched on a wire over a river and then we stopped for *Alstroemeria aurea* in various colour forms together with plenty of white *Libertia chilensis*. There was also lots of *Chloraea virescens* alongside the road but we didn't stop for these. The sky was clearing fast and by the time we'd reached Conguillio all was blue and wonderful. There were impressive lava field and ash plain landscapes with the twin -coned Volcan Lliama resplendent among them. Emerald islands of vegetation sat among the stark black lava, somehow surviving when rivers of molten rock flowed around them. We stopped for some clumps of *Senecio sp*, also finding a stunning specimen of *Calceolaria corymbosa* ssp *tetraphylla* hanging from a rock. Further on was a beautiful blue lake and then good views of many *Araucaria araucana* in front of the snowy Sierra Nevada and Volcan Lliama. Fiery flashes of *Embothrium coccineum* coloured the roadside.

After lunch we took a walk into an amazing tract of forest, filled with tall *Nothofagus dombeyi*, *Araucaria araucana* and bamboo. The path took us past



*Calceolaria corymbosa* ssp *tetraphylla*

*Ribes magellanicum*, *Azara serrata*, *Berberis trigona* and onto where we there stood a magnificent 1800-year old *Araucaria araucana* - the mother of the forest indeed. Leaving the park afterwards there were final views of Volcan Lliama before we drove onto Angol.

Basil Fawty took orders for dinner.

**Day 16      7 Dec      Parque Nacional Nahuelbuta**

A beautiful blue sky day (but no change there!). The drive out into the hills was along a winding dirt road through a mix of woods, plantations and pasture. Our first stop was for a lovely stand of pretty mauve *Lupinus microcarpus*. Then an altogether rougher beast, the orange-flowered *Loasa acanthifolius*, bristling with urticating hairs, which Bill tested. Arriving at the park entrance there were several new flowers on offer with a tumbling plant of pink *Mutisia araucana*, plentiful golden pouches of *Calceolaria corymbosa*, and a solitary bright red and yellow *Rhodophiala chilensis*. We drove slowly through the *Nothofagus obliqua* woods, the trees heavily laden in Spanish-moss lichens, seeing a single *Gavilea venosa* and then stopping for a good population of the colourful parasite - *Desmaria mutabilis*. Hummingbirds are the main pollinator and they could be glimpsed and heard arguing over prime flowers in the background. There was also a flowery bush of *Berberis darwinii*.

Before lunch there was a pleasant walk, passing through stands of *Araucaria araucana*. A few spikes of golden *Chloraea nudilabia* were found and then the fleshy rosettes of pink flowered *Calandrinia colchaguensis*. Reaching the viewpoint, there was a very clear view out across the central valley from which we could see at least seven snow-capped volcanoes, several of which we had been to. The combination of air, views and the wonderful monkey puzzle trees made it hard to leave.

Lunch was beneath two venerable *Araucaria* from where we drove onto another viewpoint from atop some imposing granite boulders. Time was spent admiring the view, looking into the forest canopy or even having forty winks. Heading back down there were bushes of *Pseudopanax laetivirens*, a feisty big tarantula and yellow-flowered *Azara serrata*. Those in car two also saw the lovely *Alstroemeria presliana* on the way back.



*Araucaria araucana*

Day 17

8 Dec

Angol and to Vilches

There was time in the morning to retrace part of our route from yesterday, mainly to look at the many different orchids that grow here. To begin with there was a collection of *Chloraea gavilu*, *C. chrysantha*, *C. stenantha*, *C. volkmannii* and *C. longipetala*, with the first two species also hybridising to produce a range of intermediates. Moving on we spotted a lone red *Rhodophiala chilensis* and growing near this was a spike of *Gavilea venosa*. Our next stop had many more *Chloraea volkmannii*, as well as some superb specimens of the *C. longipetala*, whilst tucked away in the shade was a solitary *Gavilea araucana*, and the banks had several *Calceolaria dentata* and *C. valdiviensis*. The final location was a lovely meadow with hundreds of *Chloraea volkmannii*, a few yellow *C. barbata*, delightful drifts of a pale yellow native daisy and a few bright yellow *Sisyrinchium chilense*. Some of us also whizzed back to look at a deep red-pink form of *Alstroemeria presliana* that had been seen by car two yesterday. Also growing near this was a large scrambling white *Lathyrus sp.* Returning to Angol, we stopped one more time, for a spike of *Puya alpestris* with its unusual deep blue-green flowers.

Then it was the return drive to Vilches, stopping en route for lunch and shopping and arriving in good time to enjoy the hummingbirds once again or have a dip in the pool.

Day 18

9 Dec

Laguna de Maule

Vilches is perfectly positioned to reach the heights of the flower-rich Laguna de Maule. The road followed the river valley, and along the edge we found the tall green-and-white *Chloraea incisa*. Occasional Burrowing Parrots flew across and then we reached an area with masses of *Mutisia ilicifolia*. The adjacent scrub also had yellow *Rhodophiala montana* and the delicate stems of *Loasa filicaulis*. Then we pushed on up to the lake seeing Andean Condor on the way. It was fairly calm (for once) and this allowed us to fully enjoy the abundant *Oxalis adenophylla* and even more numerous mounds of *Viola cotyledon* (in various colour forms from white to purple). The views across the blue lake around the caldera were stunning. In among the common duo were *Nassauvia revoluta* and *Olsynium obsoletum*, whilst on a rocky ridge were big clumps of



*Chloraea longipetala*

*Calceolaria polyrhiza*. The violas and oxalis continued as we drove along, stopping for an expansive view of the lake and then arriving at another very flowery spot.

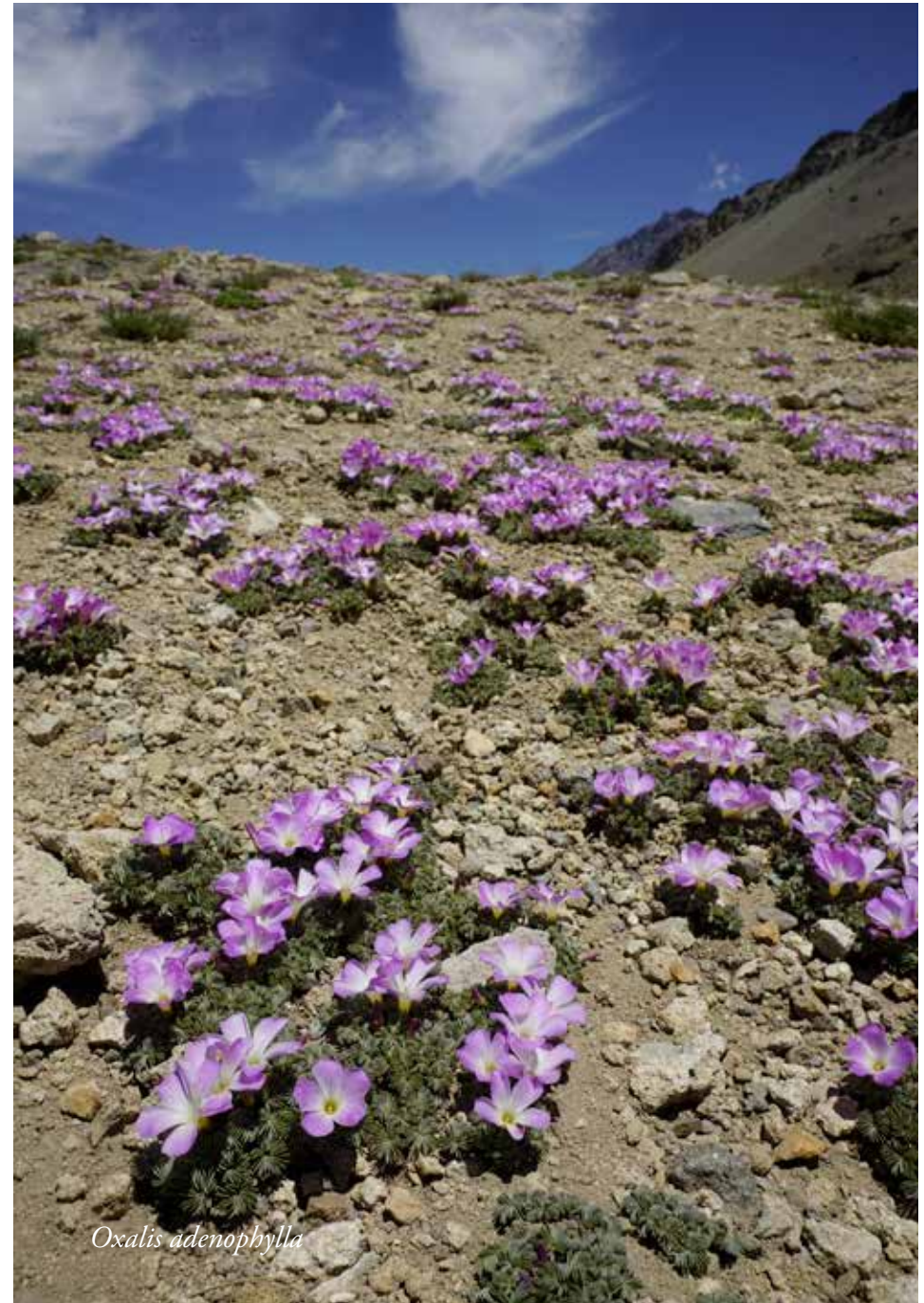
Sprouting from behind the wire of roadside reinforcements were billowing clumps of orange-red *Mimulus cupreus*, which also thronged the marshy flushes and streamsides, sometimes combining with the yellow baubles of *Calceolaria filicaulis* and mats of pink *Anagallis alternifolia*. Clumps of *Stachys gillesii*, grew in drier places as did *Schizanthus hookeri*. And on the looser, gravelly slopes were big mats of yellow *Oreopolus glacialis* and the purple of *Viola glacialis*, whilst the damp slopes had abundant *Ranunculus chilensis*. It was a wonderful alpine scene.

We were understandably reluctant to leave, but more delights awaited on way down including some really weird, eroded rocks. These were embellished with clumps of ivory-flowered *Vicia magnifolia*. More remarkable volcanic features followed including some superb lava columns and then it was back to the plants with the purple balls of *Calceolaria arachnoidea*, stands of *Gunnera tinctoria* hanging from banks and finally tall brick-red *Salpiglossis sinuata*.

From here it was down and onto Curico for a comfortable night in readiness for the next 'big pass'.

**Day 19      10 Dec      Paso Vergara**

The grand finale....and what a day with the now very familiar blue skies and clear weather. First stop was for a delightful rocky stream that was lined with clumps of gorgeous pink *Mimulus naiandinus*, stands of towering yellow daisies – *Viguera gayana*, clumps of large pouched *Calceolaria paralia* and large bushes of *Fuchsia magellanica* dripping with flowers. Bill aced a male Torrent Duck in the river too. A triple-stemmed *Puya bertroniana* followed and around the base of this were some superb red *Mutisia subulata*. Below this a stream was choked with huge *Gunnera tinctoria* with leaves taller than any of us. Climbing higher we found a good patch of *Alstroemeria ligtu* subsp. *splendens*, but these were actually just the start and once we had cleared the police



*Oxalis adenophylla*



post we stopped by a dazzling slope with hundreds more alongside rivers of golden-yellow *Tropaeolum polyphyllum*. Mingled among all of this colour was the pretty (but stinging) *Scyphanthus elegans*, and big bushes of *Buddleja globosa*. Three Andean Condor gave us a close fly past.

From here we drove straight to the pass and despite the gusty wind enjoyed a feast of flowers. There were stunning sheets of *Oxalis adenophylla*, in places mixed with *Sanicula graveolens*, whilst the rockier parts had the pretty *Oxalis erythrorhiza*, *Nastanthus spathulatus* and cushions of *Oreopolus glacialis*. The opposite slope had many white *Calandrinia affinis*, pink *Olsynium philippii* and streams lined with *Caltha sagittata*. Our descent involved some productive stops with first the vivid red-pink and gold of *Schizanthus grahamii*, the inflated pods of *Astragalus pehuenches* and a rivulet choked with the emerald leaves of *Gunnera magellanica*. Magnificent mats of *Azorella monantha* were smothered in flowers and photogenic as they enveloped rocks. Sprouting from within some of the mats were the wonderful tight-leaved discs of *Viola skottsbergiana*, some with pretty white flowers. Reese then found the granddaddy of them all, an immense specimen that must have been decades old. There was a final stop in some stony flats for one last gem, *Pachylaenia atriplicifolia*, with red-tinged cabbagey leaves and straw-yellow daisy flowers. Torrent Duck was seen well as we drove close to the river.

The last stop was to wash the cars Chilean style underneath the gushing water pipes beside the road.

## Day 20      11 Dec      Return flights

The plan had been to enjoy some seaside flora before going to the airport, but recent development and close roads meant although we made the beach it took a bit longer than planned and there were few plants. However, Bill was happy since there was a lagoon full of good birds, including Black Skimmer, White-backed Stilt, Coscoroba Swans, American Oystercatcher, gulls and Whimbrel.

The airport was reached in good time and then I was off south again to retrieve the clothes I'd left behind!



*Azorella monantha*

The logo for viranatura tours features the word "viranatura" in a large, white, serif font, with "tours" in a smaller, white, sans-serif font below it. To the right of the text is a stylized white icon of a tulip-like flower with three petals and a stem.

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*Mimulus naiandinus*