

CHILE TRIP REPORT

2025

viranatura
tours 

Tropaeolum polyphyllum, Portillo

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Day 1 26 Nov To Chile & El Arpa

All flights arrived in good time, and we met up at the airport, had a quick coffee and then set off north driving past hillsides of scattered *Acacia caven* shrubs and golden grasses, with rockier slopes having stands of cacti. Leaving our bags at the hotel we continued towards the mountains, stopping after a while for a superb specimen of *Leucostele chilensis* with at least a dozen big trumpet flowers. The landscape was now of dry hills with greenery confined to gullies and stream valleys. In one such place we stopped for the scrambling vines of *Eccremocarpus scaber* growing over shrubs of *Cestrum parqui*. Exploring a little further and we found a population of deep cerise-violet *Calceolaria purpurea* on a rocky slope with some fine clumps with many small flowers. With them was the pretty *Scyphanthus elegans* and bushy white *Teucrium bicolor*.

Reaching the turning for the ski centre we were confronted by a gate and sign that said private property no entry! After a bit of driving around we found a second road that did go a bit higher and at the end of this stopped for some lunch. An Andean condor soared out not long after as well as two variable hawks. The rest of the afternoon was spent looking around the dry slope with lots of the shrub *Colliguaja oederifera* (with distinctive three-sided fruits) among which were a number of interesting plants beginning with *Senecio adenotrichus*, a small whitish *Sisyrinchium sp.*, *Malesherbia sp.* and reaching a rockier slope there was the intense red of *Phycella af. scarlatina*, followed by the first of many lovely *Alstroemeria angustifolia* and a wonderful population of *Eriosyce aurata*, which included some immense and very old barrels, each beset with many marshmallow-like white buds. None could be found in flower, but they looked amazing as they were and close by we did find several lovely *Eriosyce curvispina* in flower, the colour varying from copper to pinkish green. In another gully we found some good bushy plants of *Calceolaria densifolia*, with the rather finished shrubs of *C. segethii* above. And, descending we found a fifth *Calceolaria* species for the day with a single plant of pale-yellow *Calceolaria nudicaulis*. Spike-leaved *Chuquiragua oppositifolia* was also seen as was a lot more *Scyphanthus elegans*. At least a dozen Chilean mockingbirds had gathered as we drove down, quite why I don't know. It was only an hour back to our relaxed and peaceful hotel and we arrived in good time. Dinner was in a chill courtyard with rufous-collared sparrows hopping about, though there was far too much to eat.



Eriosyce aurata

Day 2 27 Nov La Campana

A varied day of Mediterranean climate flora began in the precious enclave of La Campana, which we reached via a plane tree lined avenue that turned onto a rough track lined with the first of many magnificent Chilean palms (*Jubaea chilensis*), together with floriferous bushes of *Senna candolleana*. In the background was Cerro Campana peak, the slopes below clothed in more palms, stands of cacti and greyish masses of puyas. The morning was spent walking a track to a grove of especially large palms finding other interesting plants on the way with deep red *Lobelia polyphylla*, its more robust and larger-flowered cousin *L. excelsa*, fiery orange *Alstroemeria ligtu* subsp. *simsii* and the white fruits of *Tristerix aphylla* on the many stout columns of *Leucostele chilensis*, many of which also bore serveal large trumpet flowers. There was a superb viewpoint looking out across the many mature palms, punctuated with hefty cacti and big clumps of *Puya bertroniana*. Some of the latter were in flower, with huge spikes of turquoise flowers including one close to us to get us started on this iconic plant. Pretty *Schizanthus tricolor* was found, along with quite a few *Alstroemeria pulchra* and the dainty *Adiantum chilense* in cooler shadier spots. After looking at the immense old specimens of *Jubaea chilensis* we walked back to the car park and then onto a flat trail that led to several more wonderful *Puya bertroniana* in flower all with the distinctive Cerro Campana peak in the background and a wonderful sky streaked with wispy cirrus clouds. Lunch was in the cool shade of trees, the sky growing ever more dramatic.

The afternoon was spent of the southern slopes of the mountain where they merge with the ridgeline known as Cuesta Dormida, one of the richest Mediterranean flora sites in the region. We must have made at least a dozen stops along the way; there was so much to see. To begin with a narrow winding road led up to a rocky bank plastered with flower-laden bushes of *Calceolaria*



Jubaea chilensis

poilfolia, in places mixed with the last flowers of *C. purpurea*. Then there were superb drifts of silvery-leaved *Puya coerulea* and we found one or two spikes with some dark-violet flowers too. Next were bushes dressed in the soft yellow of *Mutisia rosea*, followed soon after by its larger cousin *M. latifolia* the flowers often opening a pale pink and ageing to white. Near these grew some good bushes of *Calceolaria thyriflora* too. Quite a bit of time was spent in one special spot where we found many intense scarlet *Zephyranthes phycelloides* growing beneath shrubs laden with masses of flowery orange *Eccremocarpus scaber*. The rocky ground had many *Alstroemeria angustifolia* in various colour forms, *Eriosyce curvispina* was in flower and the blue duo of *Conantherea bifolia* and *Pasithea coerulea* was also found. Moving on the roadside shrubs were bursting with amazing masses of *Eccremocarpus scaber* as well as lots of *Mutisia latifolia* and the latter was plentiful at our next long stop, lining the trackside as we searched for and found the handsome orchid, *Chloraea bletioides*. Also along the track were no fewer than three species of yellow *Calceolaria* with *C. integrifolia*, *C. thyriflora* and paler yellow *C. morisii*. A few more perfect orchid spikes were found in another patch too. There was a short stop for a mixed colour population of *Alstroemeria angustifolia* and then descending from the crest we stopped for one final treat, the gorgeous slender lilac flowered *Alstroemeria zoellneri* to complete the botany for the day.

Day 3 28 Nov Portillo

A superb day in the mountains with clear skies and calm conditions at least to begin with. We drove directly to 2800 metres, winding our way up an impressive series of switchbacks high into the Andes with some sheer walled peaks rising abruptly from the valley, transitioning from cacti studded slopes to the rocky alpine zone. The sapphire-blue waters of Laguna de Inca were calm and reflective as we set off following a slope that soon led to one of the botanical jewels of Chile, *Viola atropurpurea* and we found many including some stunning examples with several stout columns of tightly overlapping leaves ringed with deepest-violet flowers, each one embellished with waxy white flecks. On stony ground nearby was also a good number of *Gamocaprha scapigera* (syn. *Nastanthus spathulatus*), each appearing like



Viola atropurpurea

squashed broccoli and in the lee of rocks was golden-yellow *Calceolaria corymbosa* subsp. *mimuloides* with soft pink *Olsynium philippii* scattered across the slope. Carrying on up and we found *Sanicula graveolens* and then making our way up steeper scree we were rewarded with a pristine clump of *Jaborosa caulescens*. Gravely scree above this required some legwork with two steps forward and one back, but it did get us to a population of delightful *Viola montagnei* and then further across the slope more fine specimens of *V. atropurpurea* all ringed with their distinctive flowers and with the blue waters of the lake beyond. Descending the scree there was lots of foliage of *Alstroemeria spathulata* and then on the rocky slope a white centred *Cistanthe* sp. and smaller pink *M. gilliesii* together with *Leucheria runcinata*.

It was still quite calm (for this location), so we had lunch where we were with fine landscapes all around, and there was even time for a bit of retail therapy before we started back down. The sinuous road was worth photographing at one point, after which we turned off to an area with abundant mounds of *Calceolaria hypericina* smothered in small golden flowers that were attended by bumblebees. On the same boulder strewn slope was the low spreading shrub *Baccharis poeppigiana* covered in honey-scented flowers, as well as many bushes of *Diostea juncea* with sweetly fragrant flowers, whilst flat areas had lots of white *Montiopsis capitata*. Driving down a bit further we found a good area with lots of lovely *Schizanthus hookeri* and stony slopes populated with *Tropaeolum polyphyllum*, each trailing stem ending in a bunch of beautiful golden flowers. Another hillside had mounds of red-pink *Viviana marifolia* growing with floriferous tufts of *Quinchimalium chilense*, a pink form of *Mutisia acerosa* and then Justus found a couple of scented *Arjona patagonica*. Green-flowered forms of *Eriosyce curvispina* were seen as we made our way down, from where we continued to a final rich location. Here we were treated to bushes and rocky flats laden with the stunning scarlet flowers of *Mutisia subulata*, in places mingling with *Quinchimalium chilense*. Masses of white *Mutisia acerosa* grew nearby as did the purple flowers of *Malesherbia linearifolia* and small barrels of *Eriosyce aurata*. A final treat was a colony of very fresh *Alstroemeria pallida*.

The drive back was straightforward enough, and we enjoyed a final meal at our pleasant hotel with a good bottle of carmenere.



Alstroemeria pallida

Day 4 29 Nov Farellones

A fine clear morning as we bid farewell to our pleasant base for the last three nights and set off for the big city. Fortunately, we did not need to enter the city and skirted around, stopping to buy supplies before heading towards the Andes. There was a stop for a big population of vibrant orange *Alstroemeria ligtu* subsp. *simsii* that covered a grassy slope. Carrying on our journey was slowed by the numerous cyclists riding up the many switchbacks but it gave us a chance to see the transition from big cacti to open slopes covered in a gaudy blaze of invasive California poppies. Once we had reached 2500 metres the plants really began with slopes peppered with hundreds of big white *Oenothera acaulis*. Among these grew a smattering of *Tropaeolum sessilifolia* and lots of *Collomia biflora* too. A pair of Andean condors swept out as we photographed the plants, banking and showing their characteristic white upper wings. A shrike-tyrant was also seen well. A little further on and we stopped for the gold-and-candy pink *Schizanthus coccineus*.

After a lunch with rufous-banded miners and greater yellowfinches flying about we climbed onto the mountain slopes where we quickly found *Callandrinia affinis* in a wet flush and then in the adjacent area was a thick sugar frosting of countless *Olsynium junceum*. Mounds of non-flowering *Azorella ruizii* dominated parts of the slope, whilst open areas still had a few decent *Tristagma bivalve* in flower. The lovely little gem *Viola philippii* was found in flower on a track and then a ridge had some weatherbeaten and photogenic *Anarthophyllum gayanum*. Descending we found many more *Viola philippii* but few in flower, so we continued our search further downslope eventually finding a few with flowers. There was still more to come on the way down with a fine population of *Tropaeolum sessilifolia* in various tints, followed by a patch of *Leucocoryne ixiooides* in good flower. With these was the delightful bonus of several cerise flowered *Eriosyce curvispina* as well as the yellow stars of *Chaetanthera glabrata* scattered about the slope.

Our hotel was at the base of the hill, and we had dinner beneath big cedars on their large terrace as the sun set on the warm hills beyond.



Tropaeolum sessilifolia

Day 5 30 Nov Siete Tazas

Thanks to Chilean parks deciding to close on Mondays an early start was needed to get us on our way south in time to visit Siete Tazas. We had breakfast on the way, and all was looking good for a good arrival time only for it to be scuppered by a half marathon event. This meant we had to wait around for forty-five minutes, which at least gave us time to look at the huge vines of *Hydrangea serratifolia* that hung from very large *Nothofagus obliqua* in front of the bridal veil falls. We were eventually able to get started on our walk and set off via some big plants of *Fabiana imbricata* to the old growth forests. We found a succession of interesting plants as we went, beginning with purple *Corynabutilon viride*, then *Viviania elegans*, a few spikes of *Gavilea glandulifera*, some lovely pink forms of *Alstroemeria ligtu* which grew near the stunning orange red of *Salpiglossis sinuata* and the neat little rosettes of *Viola subandina*. The path turned off into an area of rockier forest, where we immediately saw some large *Nothofagus dombeyi* and then two magnificent old *Austrocedrus chilensis*. Another area had a remarkable combination of flora with the gorgeous patterned pink pouches of *Calceolaria cana* growing with stands of *Chusquea quila*(?) bamboo, *Eriosyce curvispina* as well as rosettes of *Puya bertroniana*, patches of *Haplopappus macrocephalus* and a delicate-looking (but tough) fern, *Cheilanthes glauca* wedged into rock crevices.

Our path soon reached the river that cascaded over rocks and crashed down into pools. Open areas had a few pretty magenta *Montiopsis potentilloides* and we found a huge spike of *Puya bertroniana* bursting from the rocks and *Chloraea viridiflora* before reaching our shady lunch spot beside the river. Looking across the river, a tall specimen of *Schizanthus hookeri* grew from the riverside rubble and *Oxalis squamata* was wedged into rocks. The walk back was brisk; we needed to try and get back in time to visit the famed Siete Tazas rock pools and we made it. By this hour there were few people at the pools, and we had the place to ourselves. Walking to the falls Nicola spotted a spike of *Chloraea chrysantha* and then we found *Chloraea collina* and some superb *Conanthera bifolia* too.

Austral parakeet and green-backed firecrowns were active in the many trees in the garden of the hotel when we arrived and settled in.

The rare and local *Chloraea apinnula* was also seen at some point today.



Chloraea apinnula

Day 6 **1 Dec** **Vilches to Siete Tazas**

With the rearranging of our itinerary, we now had more time to look at the various sites between our hotel and Siete Tazas and began with a delightful drift of *Conanthera bifolia* that grew just a few hundred metres down the road. Among them were the first of many lurid pink *Alstroemeria ligtu* too. A second area had even denser drifts of both as austral parakeets swept overhead. Returning to the mature matorral we had passed through yesterday we stopped for our first golden yellow *Chloraea gavilu*, growing with *Escallonia pulverulenta* laden with white spikes of flowers. There were even more orchids in another enclave away from the dusty road. Our next location was also sheltered from the dust, although we did need to burrow through the vegetation to reach it. Once there we found many pristine *Bomarea salsilla* dangling from the shrubs with clusters of pink bells along with patches of *Haplopappus macrocephalus* and *Chaetanthera chilensis* growing in the sun and along the track we also found *Calceolaria dentata* subsp. *glandulosa*, *Otholobium glandulosa* and bees were humming in a flowering bush of *Lithraea caustica*. There were a few flowers on *Amomyrtus luma* too. Two short stops followed, first for the lovely pale lilac form of *Salpiglossis sinuata* which grew near *Calceolaria angustifolia* and the next for a scattering of *Nierembergia repens* in a wet flush. The road up to the national park was pleasantly quiet and we stopped for the yellow form of *Salpiglossis sinuata* before carrying on to have lunch beside a much quieter bridal veil falls than yesterday's busy experience. Continuing to the park entrance and the adjacent section of the Rio Claro we had a brief look around finding just one *Puya berteroniana* in flower.

No matter the was more a better to come with many stops for various plants beginning with *Calceolaria integrifolia*, then *Sisyrinchium cuspidatum*, another superb specimen of the former followed by a steep bank with many *Calceolaria dentata* subsp. *glandulosa*. The calceolarias kept coming and there was another very different one next (after we had looked at a tarantula crossing the road), with a shaded bank covered in a *Calceolaria* species with large basal leaf rosettes, which may well be a new taxon! Close to these grew strands of the lovely *Tropaeolum tricolor* and beyond were big trees of flowering *Drimys winteri*. Then there was a final stop for a burgeoning population of *Chloraea gavilu* growing in the most extraordinary, eroded habitat of *Austrocedrus chilensis* woods and bare slopes, with golden spikes appearing in just about every patch of scrub across the battered



Conanthera bifolia

hillside that looked as though it should not support anything at all. With these was a few *Linum chamisonis* and I flushed a band-winged nighthawk as I searched for bigger and better orchids.

Day 7 **4 Dec** **To Antucalhue**

Bird song filled the gardens in the morning, and we were on our way by 8.30 driving south to Linares where we did some necessary shopping. We drove for a while south, refuelling along the way and then arriving at a forestry site where we found a few *Chloraea crispa* in flower and ate lunch. Taking a back road we then came across the first big population of the same orchid with many pure white (or green tinged) spikes scattered across a wide area. With these were mats of the cactus *Maihuenia poeppigii* spread across the sandy ground, though there was only the odd yellow flower. At the time we were well satisfied with our orchid find, but not far down the road and we came across an even better colony with hundreds growing beneath a row of power lines. There were wonderful specimens and clumps of over twenty spikes in places. The colony was extensive, and we measured it at eight kilometres (five miles) long!

There were more orchids to come and after half an hour we stopped at an area of open heath among the vast conifer plantations. Here there were many lemon-yellow to pale yellow *Chloraea barbata* scattered across the area. Among these were a few tall and small flowers *C. pauciflora* and short white and green *C. stenantha* as well as many hybrids involving all three species with a whole range of intermediates. Searching a second, larger area we found more of the same as well as a few *C. collicensis* in a wet flush along with countless *Conanthera bifolia*. Various other good forms and variations were photographed as we wandered across the area, also finding a few dainty *Nothoscordum bivalve* in damper places. From here we continued towards the mountains, in time rounding a bend to reveal the brooding bulk of Volcan Antuco, the peak capped in cloud that almost looked like it was erupting. There was the obligatory stop to photograph the road and volcano before we completed the last few kilometres and arrived at our cabins with the snowy slopes of the Sierra Velluda above us.



Chloraea crispa

Day 8 **3 Dec** **Laguna de las Lajas**

There was a fine view of the rugged Sierra Velluda as we ate breakfast and we were soon heading towards it. A verdant bank of greenery held us up for a while, with the immense rough leaves of *Gunnera tinctoria* growing with *Cortaderia araucana*, *Buddleja globosa* (a pale yellow form), *Erythranthe lutea* and lots of *Fuchsia magellanica*. Diminutive *Erythranthe glabrata* grew in the streamlets running beside the road and here and there waterfalls and chutes punctuated the vegetation, with towering basalt columns above. Good flowers were found on *Fuchsia magellanica* further down the road as were the cinnamon trunks of *Luma apiculata*. Moving on up to the hills we stopped by the lake and started to explore an adjacent slope almost immediately finding silvery-leaved *Senecio chilensis* followed by a superb tuft of *Calceolaria volkmannii* in the rocks. Tumbling masses of *Vicia nigricans* and loose hummocks of *Lathyrus multiceps* grew below, together with crisp leaved *Calceolaria cavanallesi*, whilst up on the steep grassy slopes was plenty of *Calceolaria corymbosa* subsp. *montana*, a few golden *Senna arnottiana* and a solitary *Zephyranthes montanum*. Many more good *Calceolaria volkmannii* grew on cliffs and rocky ground at the other end of the slope and then we walked to the lake edge where there were huge masses of *Calceolaria meyeniana* in full flower on the tough cinder substrate. Looking up at the volcano it was clear to see the various lava flows that had occurred with most recent still looking a fresh as they day they poured with not a hint of revegetation. The first plant to start to colonise lava is *Racomitrium* moss, and silvery mats could be seen on older flows.

Moving on a through the stark, black lava fields, we then reached areas of ash and lava with a lot more life, such as small *Nothofagus dombeyi* and many bushes of *Orites myrtifolia*. The road twisted its way through and then we reached the big expanse of the lake with the ash fields rising above. It was these partially vegetated ash fields that we went next climbing up to rocky knoll where we found the lovely *Viola cotyledon*. Its small cousin *V. farkasiana* was much more common, forming large colonies in favourable spots. There was also *Senecio bipontinii*, *Anemone multifida*, *Berberis empetrifolia*, flowery shrubs of *Escallonia rubra*, big mats of *Maihuenia poeppigii* with lots of yellow flowers, a couple of early flowers of *Mutisia oligodon* and then on the walk back down a *Cajophora prietea* and a fine *Pozoa volcanica* were found. The views from up on the slope were superb the whole time.

Lunch was lower down on the ash field where we all sampled our fist chirimoya fruit.



Calceolaria volkmannii

Afterwards we drove into the wild and dramatic caldera landscape, with the lake changing colour from blue to green. The ash fields ended, and we reached a flat riverside area below the north side of Sierra Velluda. Ashy-headed geese flew across as we explored the riverside cobbles finding the fiery red of *Erythranthe cuprea* and the yellow balloons of *Calceolaria filicaulis*. Wetter areas also had *Gavilea chica*, *Anagallis alternifolia* and *Lobelia oligophylla* and the cobbly expanses lots more *Pozoa volcanica*. There was time to admire the lonely male *Araucaria araucana* that stood nearby, this being the most northerly location for this species. Walking back there were mats of *Grindelia prunelloides* and *Geum magellanicum* after which we enjoyed the dramatic scenery in reverse, retracing our route and stopping for a viewpoint of the lake and sheer-sided caldera walls, mats of *Maihuenia poeppigii* and intense magenta *Montiopsis umbellata* before finishing up with pretty patches of *Nierembergia repens*.

Dinner was very enjoyable with cocktails, beef with morels and good wine.

Day 9 **4 Dec** **To Villarica**

Gentle sun illuminated the tops of the mountains and we departed on another fine, clear morning, after a while turning south. As we travelled the clouds started to appear and by the time we had turned off for Villarica, there was no sign of the eponymous volcano. Undaunted we drove up towards it and stopped for lunch with fiery flowered *Embothrium coccineum* around us and a couple of *Gavilea araucana* too. The volcano was wrapped in cloud and mists were drifting across, but this was no reason to abandon the botany, so we drove up to the chairlift and took a ride over the woods of *Nothofagus pumilio* arriving at the ski centre above the tree line. Setting across the slopes we quickly found *Valeriana fonkii* and then the first of many *Viola cotyledon*. The latter got better and better with various colour forms and even mixes of colours. On the barest ash grew silvery mats of *Belloa nivea* and pretty *Nassauvia lagascae*, a plant with wonderfully dense, pleated leaves that were more attractive than the clusters of white flowers. Many more of these and violets followed and then a few plants of taller *Nassauvia revoluta*. Continuing down slope we started to see the delicate foliage of *Adesmia longipes* with some good clumps turning up before we reached the road.



Nassauvia lagascae

The track down had banks with *Viola reichei*, *Berberis montana* and then in the shelter of the trees a couple of good populations of *Codonorchis lessonii* growing with *Ovidia andina*. Fresh *Embothrium coccineum* were found near a few *Calceolaria filicaulis* (?) too. The volcano never appeared, and we drove down making a final stop for some pristine spikes of *Chloraea pichiquen* and a bank swathed in *Ugni molinae*, before arriving at our comfortable hotel in Pucon.

Dinner was in a Uruguayan steakhouse which served ridiculously large portions!

Day 10 5 Dec Villarica national park

The skies were clearing fast as we drove east and by the time we were halfway there was a blue sky and the impressive sight of Volcan Lanin straight ahead. We passed the fresh green of various *Nothofagus* and onto languid Lago Quillihue where the first of many architectural monkey puzzles stood sentry. Setting off for our walk we had not even reached the start when we saw our first two *Chloraea magellanica*, the porcelain orchid and arguably the finest of all Chilean orchids. As we continued there were the scrambling stems of *Lathyrus magellanicus* and hummocks of *L. multiceps*, bright yellow *Viola reichei* and tumbling masses of *Vicia nigricans* all around. Alongside a stream we managed to find the last flowers of intense red *Ourisia ruellioides* and this being such an early season we were glad of this. The flipside is of course there are other things in flower that usually are not and we found two soon after, dainty *Solenomelus segethii* and the brimstone spikes of *Gavilea lutea*. The mix of *Nothofagus pumilio* and *Araucaria araucana* continued, and at one point a male magellanic woodpecker alighted on the dead trunk of the former, showing very well for a time and delivering his trademark hammer blows to the wood. More orchids followed, including a few *Codonorchis lessonii* and the ground was coloured with hundreds of *Quinchimalium chilense*. Reaching a clearing with further monkey puzzle-framed views of majestic Volcan Lanin and secret dell also had *Zephyranthes andicola* and nearby were the inflated pouches of *Calceolaria filicaulis* (?). We retraced our steps and then drove a short distance to an idyllic picnic site surrounded by stately *Araucaria*.

The afternoon began among another fine stand of *Araucaria*, beneath which grew *Senecio chilensis*, many more *Chloraea magellanica* and a wonderful glowing trio of *Zephyranthes andicola*. There was volcano in the background photo



Zephyranthes andicola

opportunities for both. In the distance we could see hillsides ablaze with *Embothrium coccineum* and these were a feature as we drove with a regular fiery punctuation to the roadside flora. On the rocks we found the delightful *Calceolaria tenella*, cliff-dwelling specimens of *Buddleja globosa* and above these the last flowers on *Gavilea odoratissima*. Hefty rough-leaved *Gunnera tinctoria* was also frequent and we stopped for an area with these as well as more *Calceolaria tenella* and *Nothofagus alpina*. *Alstroemeria aurea* was in flower further on and then we stopped for a bank with *Calceolaria dentata* subsp. *araucana* before suddenly as we rounded a bend, a glorious view of the now perfectly clear Volcan Villarica appeared. There was a second stop for this in a more open spot, it was impossible to resist such an iconic sight.

Indeed, even as we walked through town on the way to our restaurant later the looming snowy presence revealed itself at the end of streets, a slumbering menace that looked so innocent.

Day 11 6 Dec Conguillio national park

The bustling town of Pucon was barely waking up on a Saturday morning as we left, the quiet traffic allowing us to reach Villarica in half an hour where we had the bonus of a final grand view of Volcan Villarica across the water of Lago Villarica. Turning off the main road we drove through a green rural landscape switching from smooth tarmac to bumpy dirt and back again before stopping for a stand of *Alstroemeria aurea* in flower with a couple of different colour forms. There was a further stop for a colony of *Chloraea pichiquen* among which were a few *C. stenantha*. The looming bulk of Volcan Lliama had been growing in size as we progressed and now rose above us in spectacular form as we drove across the vast ash fields and past frozen in time hulks of lava flows, even now eighty years later barely showing the colonisation of mosses. The remarkable landscape was stark illustration of the power of nature with the dark treacle of lava flows that had enveloped surviving islands of vegetation that now contrasted with the sterile wastes. How much forest had been lost and could be lost in the future? After taking photos at a couple of viewpoints we then entered these emerald remains, an instant transition from sun baked barren rock. Tucked away in a rocky gully we found a colony of *Calceolaria corymbosa* subsp. *tetraphylla* and tumbling *Azorella monteroi* and then stopped for the crystal-clear waters of Lago Arcoiris, created when lava had dammed a stream and drowned the trees. A striking sight but perhaps not as striking as the architectural stands of *Araucaria araucana* that



Embothrium coccineum

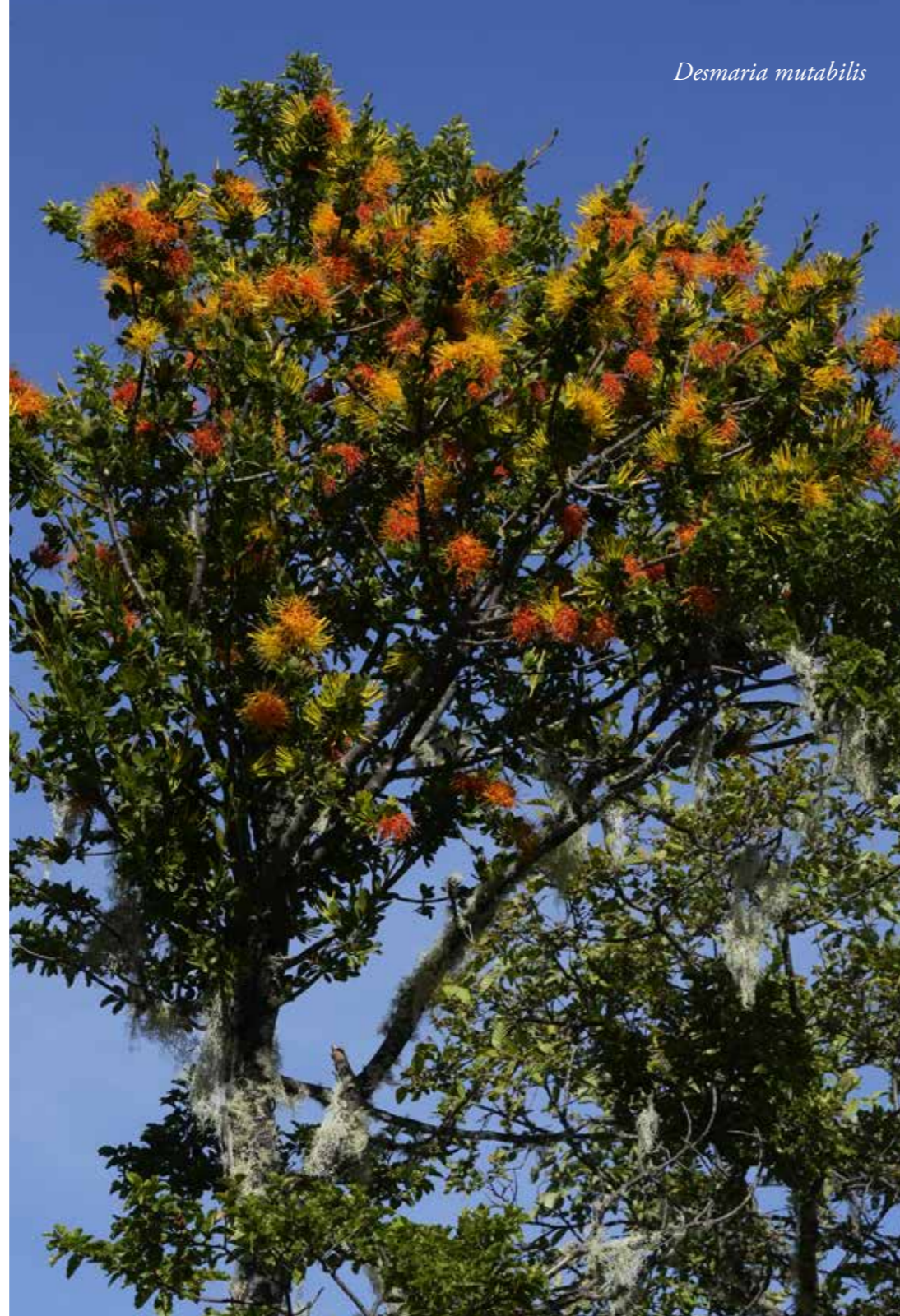
appeared further on, the lichen-swathed corky trunks and spidery whorls framing the huge snowy cone of Volcan Llaima. Many photos were taken and despite the weekend crowds it was still very impressive and such vistas continued as we drove, stopping occasionally for another perfect volcano-framing shot or further on for floriferous bushes of *Embothrium coccineum* as the fiery foreground.

Lunch was in the shade and then we drove a short distance to the start of a walk. Our route immediately entered a surreal world of very tall, very large trees packed together such that a vaulted canopy of huge branches of *Nothofagus dombeyi* and umbrellas of *Araucaria* were suspended above us with an understorey of bamboo and *Drimys andina*. We walked for forty-five minutes finding some immense specimens of *Nothofagus* before reaching the Araucaria Madre, or mother of the forest, an 1800-year-old magnificent tree that soared straight up to fifty metres with a girth of 2.2 metres. The walk back found a small flowering *Berberis trigona* and allowed us to enjoy the wonderful forest a second time. Then driving out we found a few good flowering *Azara serrata* before exiting the woods and enjoying a final big view of the volcano. There was the final bonus of a couple of pristine and glowing *Zephyranthes andicola* and then it was on through the green countryside on a smooth and light traffic ride to Angol and our pleasant accommodation tucked away in a big cherry orchard.

The cherries outside our door were sampled after dinner...delicious.

Day 12 7 Dec Nahuelbuta national park

A fine clear morning and we were away a touch earlier to make the most of the wonderful Nahuelbuta, a national park that preserves the last remaining tract of coastal range monkey puzzle forest. There was only one stop on the way in for a good plant of *Loasa acerifolia* and once inside the park gates new flowers immediately started to appear, beginning with the fiery trumpets of *Zephyranthes chilensis* and pristine golden *Calceolaeria corymbosa*. Moving along the trees were decked in hanging lichens creating an ethereal glow in the sun and we stopped next in an area where they smothered live and dead trees alike along with the colourful bundles of



Desmaria mutabilis

parasitic *Desmaria mutabilis* whose yellow flowers age from yellow through orange to red. They grew with floriferous bushes of *Lomatia hirsuta* in an enchanting little clearing in the woods. Another hot colour brought us to a halt next with the first of several red *Zephyranthes splendens*. This was not far from the start of a very enjoyable walk. Leaving the vehicle in the dappled shade of two magnificent old *Araucaria* we wandered along a wide track with more venerable giant trees as well as patches of *Oxalis arenaria*, *Libertia tricocca*, damp banks with tiny *Pinguicula chilensis*, a flower on *Mutisia araucana*, pretty *Calandrinia colchagensis* and then a wonderful perfect spike of golden-orange *Chloraea nudilabia*. Paul and I also saw a Magellanic tapaculo, not an easy bird to see. Our route continued into more near-mystic groves of lichen draped forest, ascending to a rock outcrop that was crowned with many corky-barked *Araucaria araucana*. Below them grew dense tufts of *Fascicularia bicolor* and there were a few spikes of *Chloraea nudilabia* as well as superb views in all directions which took in distant volcanic peaks as well as the impressive and precious tracts of virgin forest.

We walked back and enjoyed a good lunch in our peaceful picnic site before carrying on and up a dusty road to a busier but nonetheless interesting part of the park. A track led through more forest with lots of *Desfontainea fulgens* as ground cover and onto another viewpoint that offered views into the crowns of both male and female monkey puzzles. Elsewhere was a flowering bush of *Azara serrata* and *Pseudopanax laetevirens* and from a second viewpoint more *Zephyranthes splendens* in grassy patches between peculiar rock pavement. The next hour was spent searching for and finding fine spikes of *Gavilea venosa* in the shady confines of the woods. Exiting the park, we made our way back along the gravel road and had just reached tarmac when we received a puncture from something along the road. The wheel was changed quickly enough, and we stopped at a supermarket to buy supplies and then enjoyed a pleasant DIY dinner at our B&B among the cherries.

Day 13 8 Dec Angol and to Vilches Alto

Our journey north was to really begin today, but before we set off there was time to visit some local sites. The first was a bit finished this early a season with just a few *Chloraea chrysantha* hybrids, so we moved on to a pleasant area of



Chloraea longipetala

Nothofagus obliqua woods and pasture. This area was rich in orchids, including the beautiful *Chloraea longipetala* of which we found in a thriving colony and among the pristine ivory spikes was the added bonuses of *C. barbata* and *C. volkmannii* with them. A little further along a we stopped for a good spike of *C. gavilu*, this time with *Gavilea araucana* growing on a bank with plenty of *Calceolaria dentata* and a tumbling *Mutisia latifolia* that was just starting the flower. A few more good specimens of *Chloraea volkmannii* completed our session and we drove back stopping only for a developing spike of *Puya alpestris* on a bank. Finding a tyre repair shop, we were told it would take an hour, but somehow, we jumped the queue, and it took only forty minutes, which was enough time for Hoy to go off and buy a big punnet of fresh raspberries that was soon devoured.

Now we had ground to cover and drove an hour and half on good fast roads. Lunch was in a service station with many options of wildly varying calorie content. Then the remaining couple of hours had us back up in the green hills of Vilches, with pleasant cool shade and it was good to arrive early and have time to relax before the next two busy botanical days.

Day 14 9 Dec Laguna del Maule

A day full of plants that varied from Mediterranean to alpine and back again. The long approach road followed the Maule River, initially through quite dry habitat with scattered trees where we found a couple of pristine *Chloraea incisa* in flower. Next, growing on rocks and cliffs, were some very good *Puya coerulea* with many midnight-blue flowers. By the time we had reached the next stop the air was already starting to warm. The surrounding bushes were draped in masses of flowering *Mutisia ilicifolia* and in the scrub was delicate *Pinnasa filicicaulis* and the pretty lilac daisies of *Leucheria coereulescens*. The road soon started climb as we entered an impressive volcanic landscape of lava flows and shattered cones and ridges. On an ash slope grew a good clump of *Calceolaria arachnoidea*, bushier *C. dentata*, superb stands of *Schizanthus hookeri* and on damper sections fabulous big spreads of *Erythranthe lutea*. Masses of bright yellow *Calceolaria andina* were on the rocks. We pushed on to the lake and after completing the customs formalities drove up for our first view of the spectacular landscape, a vast sweep of volcanic events that surround the extensive waters. On a slope



Oxalis adenophylla

leading down to the water we found our first colony of the lovely *Oxalis adenophylla*, one of the gems of Chile's alpine flora. Time was spent enjoying these, also seeing *Calceolaria polyrhiza* and *Nassauvia revoluta*. There were a few more flowery clumps of *Oxalis adenophylla* at our next stop, including one perfectly poised above the lake for a great photo. However, this slope was dominated by a wonderful display of *Viola cotyledon* in a suite of colour forms from white to deep violet and sometimes all mixed on the one plant. They were in perfect condition and some plants had up to a hundred flowers. A solitary and superb mat of *Oreopolus glacialis* was also found with a prime lake view to provide the finishing touch.

Lunch was at the far end of the lake in a more sheltered valley and where this early season we had *Tropaeolum incisum* growing nearby. Exploring the valley afterwards we found *Viola glacialis*, lots of slender *Oksynium junceum* subsp. *depauperatum*, many pale-yellow *O. obscurum* and a grey-throated seedsnipe called at length and posed on a prominent boulder. Moving across the other side of the valley there were many superb clumps of grey-leaved *Calceolaria corymbosa* subsp. *floccosa* and then in damper paces a few *Caltha sagittata*, some fiery displays of *Erythranthe cuprea* with *Calceolaria filicicaulis* and the more dainty and refined flowers of *Pinguicula chilensis*. A tuft of deep pink *Ourisia breviflora* was a nice bonus. It was now time to start our journey back, stopping first at a big viewpoint across the lake and then next for an interesting assemblage of eroded ash columns with the river snaking through and a grand view of the lava flows beyond. Lots of *Vicia magnifolia* grew all around. More views followed and then there was a bonus of several pristine spikes of *Chloraea alpina* in various shade of lemon to gold growing with *Zephyranthes montanum* and the dense mounds of *Viola congesta*. Both *Calceolaria cavanallesi* and *C. arachnoidea* grew near the stream we had to hop across too. A final botanical note was a population of orange-red *Salpiglossis sinuata* after which it was time to sit back and enjoy the two-and-a-half-hour drive to Curico, which went smoothly enough and we were soon in our comfortable city hotel with its impressive palm trees in the courtyard and foyer.



Calceolaria corymbosa subsp. *floccosa*

Day 15 10 Dec El Planchon

The Andes beckoned once more as we headed east from Curico, following the Teno River valley and slowly gaining elevation with the silhouetted ridges ahead of us. Our first stop was for a colony of the lovely *Erythranthe naiandinus* that smothered a seep beside the road, the flowers with variable amounts of pink to cherry red and as we looked at these flocks of burrowing parrots flew past as we looked at these, revealing their colours well in the morning light. A tributary stream tumbling out of the hills held another thriving colony of the same plant, this time growing with hefty plants of *Calceolaria paralia* laden with soft yellow 'slipper' flowers and which grew together with brighter yellow *C. petiolares* as well as dangling *Fuchsia magellanica*. It was a lovely scene of abundance and colour. The road branched off and we left the dust generating mining trucks behind, climbing higher into the dry hills until we reached a good colony of *Alstroemeria ligtu* subsp. *splendens* that grew with floriferous bushes of *Calceolaria thyrsoflora* that were heavily laden with flowers, the buzzy chirrup of cicadas filling the air as we explored the slope. A rougher side road then took us much higher zig-zagging uphill to 2200 metres to where we stopped by a rocky knoll with a spectacular view of the mountains in either direction. Beside us grew the lovely deep-pink and gold *Schizanthus grahamii*, whilst on the rocks was a colony of *Eriosyce curispina* and both *Calceolaria andina* and a second *C. sp.* whilst *Phacelia secunda* was everywhere. From here we walked sections of the track finding many plants from the inflated seedpods of *Astragalus pehuenche* and *Loasa heterophylla* to the lovely trailing stems of golden-flowered *Tropaeolum myriophyllum*. Lower down were fragrant mounds of *Mulgurea spathulata* mingled with showy *Alstroemeria ligtu* subsp. *splendens* followed by a slope smothered in tropaeolums and alstroemerias that seemed a good place for a very scenic lunch.

An Andean condor swept over at one point and moustached turcas were vocal and obvious. We had to reach Santiago, so after lunch we began our journey stopping to photograph more stunning views and drifts of *Alstroemeria ligtu* subsp. *splendens* and then further on for a big plant of *Schizanthus grahamii*. A final stop at an orchid site produced many *Chloraea incisa* and the delicate stems of *Tweedia birostrata*. We made our way to the Ruta 5 and our airport hotel, bidding farewell to Justus, then enjoying a good dinner and large pisco sours. Tomorrow Patagonia!



Alstroemeria ligtu subsp. *splendens*

Day 16 11 Dec To Puerto Natales

The adventure continued... though there was a stuttering start with a one-hour delay to our flight. When it did take off the first half of it had clear views of the lake studded rugged Andes and some of the areas we had recently botanised in. Cloud hid the southern icefields but relented as we approached the windswept coastal plain around Punta Arenas. The change in conditions from where we had come from was immediate, the air cooler and fresher and windier. However, the forecast rain held off for now as we drove across the vast landscape of grassy heaths and battered *Nothofagus antarctica* forests, many trees damaged and heavily parasitised with *Misodendron punctulatum*. Various wildlife was seen with a solitary Chilean flamingo in a lake with families of upland geese, Chilean harriers and caracaras. We rose and descended through an undulating landscape until patches of pink brought us to a stop in an area of shingle flats. Here we found superb clumps of the lovely *Oxalis enneaphylla*, with finely cut leaves and various colour forms. With them grew mats of *Azorella monantha*, sweet-scented *Hypochaeris incana* and *Cerastium arvense*. Even larger clumps of the former were found at a second site, and we got to enjoy them in the sunshine albeit in gusty wind. At a roadside cut the star plant was the stunning *Calceolaria uniflora* with several good clumps of this much desired beauty. With these grew *Senecio kingii*, dense cushions of *Bolax gummifera*, fragrant *Arjona patagonica*, sprawling mats of *Empetrum rubrum* and rather wind-blown *Olsynium biflora*. There were more good colour forms of *Oxalis enneaphylla* here too in what amounted to a fine cross-section of Patagonian flora. We had been fortunate to have dry weather until this point but soon the rain squalls began, and we were all glad to be in the vehicle for the last section of the drive, arriving at a moody Puerto Natales with black-necked swans bobbing in the waves and grey clouds wrapping up the mountains beyond.

Dinner was even more enjoyable with that reassuring feeling of being inside in the warm while the bad weather continued outside.



Oxalis enneaphylla

Day 17 12 Dec Torres del Paine I - Laguna Azul

Alas, the rough weather continued and after a quick shop in town we drove on through squally showers, the mountains with a fresh dressing of snow that was largely cut off by low cloud and only the odd great grebe on a lake until we stopped to buy souvenirs at Cerro Castillo. Fortunately, the wildlife picked up after that we good views of a sleek little grey fox, then an Andean condor hung in the air above us giving an excellent close sighting (the first of many today) followed by guanacos feeding in the roadside pasture and heaths. Large tracts of heaths were dominated by *Junellia tridens*, which was all in full very fragrant flower and we stopped to photograph this also finding a colony of *Calceolaria polyrhiza*. The rain had eased for a while, but the wind was cold as it whipped across the snow. This didn't stop us botanising and we stopped next for an area with mounds of both *Adesmia boronoides* and *Azorella prolifera* (= *Mulinum spinosum*) that also had a good number of golden *Alstroemeria patagonica*, a diminutive member of this genus of robust flowers. A second nearby site had superb flower encrusted cushions of *Azorella monantha*, with tufts of *Adesmia lotoides* growing among them as well as mats of *Nassauvia maiviae*. There were good textured views across the hummocks of steppe vegetation as the sun started to break through. This typical vegetation covered large areas, clothing slopes dissected by bands of complex strata. Next were wonderful and prolonged close views of a Magellanic snipe as it probed a muddy bank for breakfast. We had stopped for plants, but on such a rough day it seemed mean to disturb the bird, and we left it unmolested and moved on. We now started to see more guanacos and condors seemed to be almost constantly in the air, indeed as the day went on, we had several amazing views of these majestic birds as the floated lazily past in the gusty wind. There was a slope with lots of *Calceolaria biflora* and *Viola maculata* before we got a view of Laguna Azul which still had a blue colour despite the weather. Families of upland geese, red-gartered coots and crested ducks fed in the pond, hardy birds unconcerned about the rain.

Lunch was down in a sheltered spot among the *Nothofagus antarctica* which also nurtured good clumps of *Geum magellanicum*. Driving back up afterwards we stopped for some good plants of *Olsynium biflora* with their attractive, purple-lined flowers and then exploring the area further found a wonderful big colony



Calceolaria uniflora

of *Calceolaria uniflora*, that also included many and varied hybrids with *C. polyrhiza*. Tucked in with in the short heath was the odd *Nassauvia sp.* and *Polygala salasiana* together with the red-pink buttons of *Leucheria purpurea*. The sun was going in and out and there were now some views across to the hills though the weather was changing by the minute and by the time we descended it was snowing. This didn't prevent us getting photographs of first two small *Anarthophyllum desideratum* and then pristine spikes of *Chloraea magellanica*. Good views of guanaco followed before we got some hazy partial views of the Paine Towers. It was now calm enough to visit the large Paine Grande waterfall enjoying yet more great condor moments as we made our way to another interesting location, this one with a much smaller waterfall that harboured a few late-flowering *Ourisia ruellioides* and a good population of *Alstroemeria patagonica*. Returning to the place we had seen the snipe we now looked at the large colony of pretty *Samolus spathulatus* that grew there with *Azorella trifurcata*. The waters of Lago Sarmiento were now showing more blue and we stopped here and for a different herd of guanacos as we made our way back after a productive day, now enjoying better views of the vast Patagonian landscape.

Day 18 13 Dec Torres del Paine II

We took a different route to the national park, with sun breaking through on peculiar rock formations and then a rainbow cast over the hills behind wind-battered *Embothrium coccineum*. The road was not in the best condition, but the plants made up for this with stops for roadsides filled with flowering bushes of *Escallonia rosea* and *Gaultheria mucronata* with plentiful *Gavilea araucana* and drifts of *Lathyrus magellanicus*. And orchids were a mainstay of the day with the next stop for a mixed colony of *Gavilea littoralis* growing with *Chloraea gaudichaudii* and *Correorchis leptopetala*. Further along with lake views, a look at the *Misodendron punctulatum* laden trees of *Nothofagus betuloides*, trailing stems of *Gunnera magellanica* and then wedged into rock crevices were pretty tufts of *Calceolaria tenella* and *C. biflora*. We reached the park entrance and drove past flat grasslands brimming with orchids. After a quick look in the visitor centre we headed down to Lago Grey where we had lunch in relative shelter among the scrubby *Nothofagus antarctica*.



Alstroemeria patagonica



A third tree of the day, *Nothofagus pumilio* provided the interest afterwards when we spent time among one of few accessible areas of mature forest, with many old trees with deeply fissured bark. Below were wonderful drifts of *Lathyrus magellanicus*, as well as *Gavilea lutea*, *Codonorchis lessonii* and *Viola reichei*. The walk out to the boat to see the glacier looked a grim prospect with the gusty cold wind, but fortunately we had other plans even if they too involved a battle with the wind at times. A trail led up towards high dark cliffs and we took this almost immediately finding large populations of hundreds of *Gavilea supralabellata*, sprinkled with a few *Chloraea magellanica*. The gusts were strong, but we persevered and found good specimens of the latter higher up and then on dry banks tufts of *Calceolaria uniflora* and then a few *Gavilea gladysiae*. Hoy then found a superb ten-spike clump of *Chloraea magellanica* with the bonus of a pollinating wasp. We watched the insect at length as it picked up pollinia on its back and walked back and forth to different flowers, seemingly obsessed with the orchid. By now the landscape was clearing a bit and we had good views of the blue lake waters below as we descended. Given the state of the road coming in it seemed better to drive back a different way so we followed the main park road and stopped for several wonderful lake and mountain views with the impressive Cuernos del Paine finally revealing themselves above Lago Nordenskjold. Sapphire Lago Sarmiento was next, the shore white with the skeletal structures of strombolites with the heavy fragrance of *Junellia tridens* in the air.

Our last leg was great for wildlife with first a great view of a hairy armadillo, which ran across the road and stopped and looked back at us. Crested caracara was seen very well, as were guanacos and then a male Darwin's rhea with his six chicks. At one point they hurried away, and we then saw why, a grey fox was sneaking through the low shrubs eyeing the tasty chicks. The views near the park were now much clearer and by the time we reached our hotel the fjord had cleared enough to see the snowy ridges beyond.

We finally managed to buy some calafate jam too!

Day 19 14 Dec Torres del Paine III

Plants took a bit of back seat today as the much-improved weather brought landscapes and wildlife to the fore. It all started with at least twenty Andean



Paine massif from Lago Nordenskjold

condors, half gathered in a field and the other half soaring effortlessly, with several of them close by allowing us to fully appreciate their incredible aerial skills. From here we went to look at the strombolite skeletons on the shore of Lago Sarmiento with a spiny *Adesmia sp.* among the cobbles. There was a big herd of guanacos too and then on a windy (and cold) shale flat were many *Alstroemeria patagonica* the little golden trumpets often appearing from among cushions of *Azorella monantha* or flowery mats of *Nassauvia maiviae*. Wind was to play a part today as we experienced the real Patagonia, though we managed to find more sheltered places. Spectacled ducks and a close crested caracara were seen as we entered the national park and then the clouds started to lift from the sculpted peaks of the Cuernos del Paine, and we were right on time to stop for several magnificent views of this iconic range with the turquoise blue of Lago Nordenskjold in the foreground. Lunch was sat watching whitecaps rushing

in on a small lake, which rather hinted at how strong the winds were in this part of the park. The plan had been to complete a walk that took in a waterfall and more views of the landscape around Lake Pehoe but the winds were too strong, and the trail had been officially closed so we heeded the warning and instead drove on to the western areas where the wind was noticeably less. More fine viewpoints followed, then a stop for the handsome *Lathyrus nervosus* and a short trail that took us past colonies of *Correorchis leptopetala*, *Nothofagus* laden with loose mops of *Misodendron* and rocks that held flowering *Saxifraga magellanica*.

Turning around the walking trail was still closed so we continued along a different road, nearly getting blown off our feet at another stop. The famed towers were still wrapped in cloud, so we made our way back towards Lago



Darwin's Rhea

Sarmiento, stopping to look at a Darwin's rhea on the way and then more good views of guanaco before enjoying a final grand sweep of the Paine massif from across the lake. The sun was out as we drove back with a varied cloudscape and a clear fjord backed with snow-capped mountains.

At dinner we had the closest look a southern lapwing imaginable as lenticular clouds stretched across the blue sky.

Day 20 15 Dec To Santiago

Leaving at 7.30 the waters of the fjord were calm with many black-necked swans feeding inshore, and cresting the rise out of town the vastness of Patagonia was stretched out before us as we drove on in good sunny weather. We had a little time for short stops and did so for the same *Oxalis enneaphylla*, population we stopped for a few days ago, this time also finding *Leucheria eriocephala* and *Nassauvia darwinii*. The sun may have been out, but the wind still had teeth. A male Darwin's rhea herded eleven chicks and was feeding together with four other adults and we saw many more of these iconic Patagonian birds as we continued, also seeing southern caracara and black-chested buzzard-eagle. Reaching the Straits of Magellan we refuelled saw two grey foxes and then tried for *Perezia recurvata*, which we unfortunately still in bud. This was near the airport where we dropped off the car and checked in. The first part of the flight was clear with a grand view of the Paine Massif and Glacier Grey top off our Patagonia experience.

After a stop in Puerto Montt (giving us a distant look at Valvidian rain forest) we finished the flight to Santiago and walked to the airport hotel, checking in, enjoying a final good meal and pisco sour together before bidding farewell to Hoy who was on a late flight back home.

Day 21 16 Dec Flights

Flights to Germany, New Zealand and Turkiye had us all departing in different directions in the morning and all back in time for Christmas shopping after a botanically diverse three weeks in Chile.

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Viola montagnei