

# Blue Whales off Chiloé Island, Chile

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As part of a three month wildlife trip around South America by public transport, I was keen to try and recreate David Attenborough's Life of Mammals sequence and see Blue Whales off Chiloé. Very little seemed to have been written about how to organise a boat trip in the area. Talking to people locally they all seemed to point me towards the Gulf of Corcovado and Quellón at the south end of the island and I arrived there on the 10<sup>th</sup> February. From what I could glean, Quellón was being developed as a whale watching destination, along the same lines as Puerto Piramides in Argentina. However, it didn't seem to be ideally suited to me, as it is very prone to bad weather and the whales were several hours away. Anyway, I booked onto a whale watching trip for the next day, but this was constantly being cancelled due to either

bad weather, or a lack of people. Perhaps I was unlucky, but after a week I thought I would try a new tactic. I had seen a reference to whales being observed off Punta Guabun in the north-west corner of Chiloé so I journeyed up there and to my surprise I could see at least 10 whales blowing distantly off shore. From the size of the blows alone they must have be Blues. Right so how was I to get out there. A visit to the local fishing harbour at Ancud drew

a blank. No boats appeared willing to take me out, although this could have been partly due to my basic grasp of Spanish.

The next day I visited the Magellanic/Humboldt Penguin Colony at Puñihuil to see the birds and hopefully Marine Otter (3 animals seen). As it was not far away from the whales, I talked to the boat men and he agreed to take me out in three days times.

Success at last. The resulting three-hour boat trip (one and a half hours out there) resulted in at least 6 animals being seen. We positioned ourselves in front of the animals and waited for them to approach, some down to 10 metres. It wasn't quite as flat calm as it was for Attenborough but it was amazing, especially when we were in the trough of a wave and the whale surfaced above us!

