

*Lyncodon patagonicus*

Patagonian Weasel or Huroncito

Briar Burgess

**Description:**



Photo of a taxidermic mount of a Patagonian Weasel in the Museum of Patagonia in San Carlos de Bariloche, Argentina.

Photo by Serge Ouachée.

fur with brown, dark brown, black or yellow hints, and a band down its back and head. *L. patagonicus* also has small ears as well as a bushy tail. (Malek, 2003) As one of the least known carnivores in South America, *L. patagonicus*'s physical description is some of the most concrete knowledge we have of the species, and even then it is limited to a few museum pieces (IUCN,

The Patagonian weasel

(*Lyncodon patagonicus*) or Huroncito in Spanish is a weasel of the Mustelidae family, a family that originated in Asia approximately 30 million years ago and resides over most of the world. (Sato, 2012) *L. patagonicus* is about 36cm to 44cm (14 to 17 inches) long from head to tail and has short legs. It has whitish



The Long Tailed Weasel (*Mustela frenata*) is native to most of the US, Mexico, and a small part of South America. It is not very closely related to *L. patagonicus*. However, it does bear a striking resemblance. Photo credited to the National Park Service.

2014). These specimens let us know that *L. patagonicus*'s size and shape is similar to other weasels of the Mustelidae family, especially that of the Long Tailed Weasel (*Mustela frenata*) (Teta, 2006). However, *L. patagonicus* is actually most genetically similar to the Lesser Grisson (*Galictis cuja*) or the Greater Grisson (*Galictis vittata*) (Sato, 2012).

### **Legal Status:**

*L. patagonicus* is listed in the IUCN Database as “Data Deficient” (IUCN, 2014). This means more information needs to be gathered about this animal before a definitive label can be put on its status. However, the Red Book of Argentinian Mammals it is categorized under “Near Threatened” (Schiaffini et al, 2013).

### **Ecology:**

*L. patagonicus* preys upon rodents and birds (IUCN, 2014). The *L. patagonicus* is nocturnal, meaning it is active at dusk and night (Malak, 2003). It may be part of the tuco-tuco (*Ctenomys spp.*) community (IUCN, 2014) as they have been known to enter their burrows as well as mountain cavies burrows (Malek, 2003). It is likely that one of *L. patagonicus*'s roles in the ecosystem is keeping small rodent populations down. However we do not know exactly what *L. patagonicus* preys upon or what preys upon it. More research needs to be done to find its true functions and niche within the ecosystem.

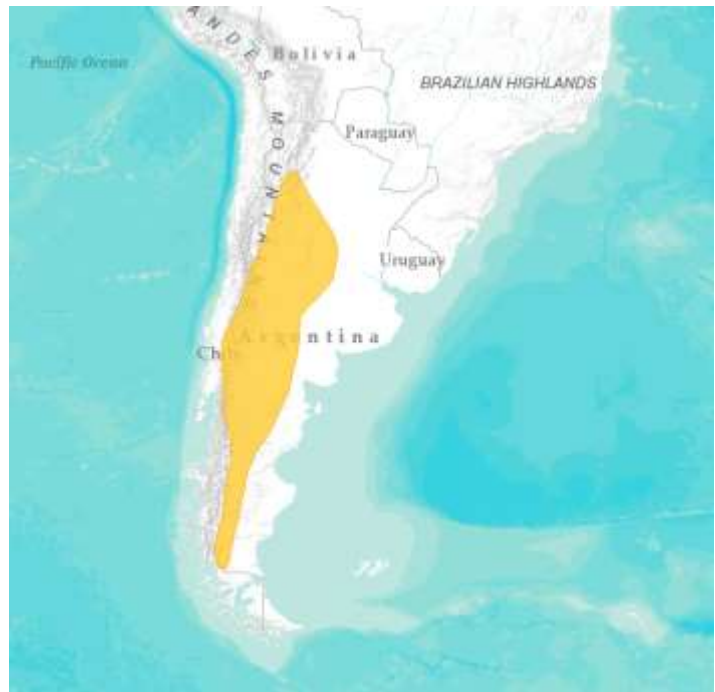
While little is known about the predators of *L. patagonicus*, when threatened, *L. patagonicus* has a neck pelage that will erect (Malek, 2003). Though it is uncommon, *L. patagonicus* is found to be eaten by the local buzzard-eagle, (*Geranoetus melanoleucus*) (Teta, 2006).

### Range and Population Trend:

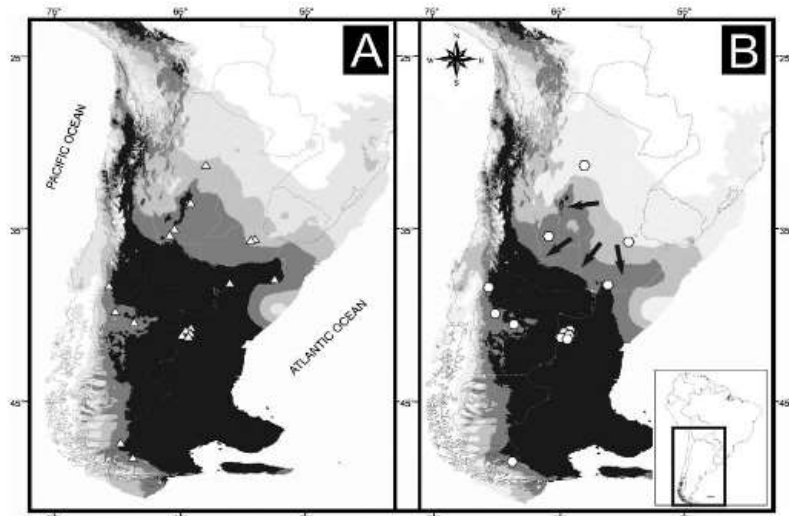
Though the species has been considered “rare” from as far back as 1926 (Rososk, 1926), *L. patagonicus* has a range spread over the northern half of Argentina and a small part of Chile over the Andes Mountains (IUCN, 2014). This area consists of temperate arid and semi-arid areas (IUCN, 2014): these areas have climates that do not fluctuate much due to seasons, as well as have little precipitation. Within this area *L. patagonicus* makes its home in shrubby woodlands (Schiaffini et al, 2013). It lives in Pampus areas with light colored soil, but not deserts (IUCN, 2014). *L. patagonicus*’s range has not been stagnant over time though.

Though *L. patagonicus* has always been located in the southern tip of South America, its exact range has fluctuated with global weather patterns and possibly other environmental factors. (Schiaffini et al, 2013) From fossil records, ranges much larger than their current range would be predicted (Schiaffini et al 2013).

The species is predicted to normally have a low density and number of individuals, and it is suspected that if more information is collected about *L. patagonicus*, such as its habitat, predators, mating habits, population trends, foraging habits, or precise threats, it could eventually



Screenshot from the IUCN’s range map for *L. patagonicus*. It shows that the range extends from central and western Argentina to Eastern Chile.



A view of potential ranges for the Huroncito calculated by Pleistocene and Holocene fossil records as drawn up by Schiaffini, 2013

be re-categorized as “Least Concern” in the IUCN Red List (IUCN, 2014). We can extrapolate from different members of the Mustelidae family for things like reproductive behavior, care for young, and diet; however, because so little is known about the *L. patagonicus*, this is only

speculation. Because of recent expeditions into little-known areas to catalogue species, more sightings have added to its known range, however these sightings are still limited (IUCN, 2014).

### Threats and Conservation:

Local threats to *L. patagonicus* include habitat degradation due to sheep grazing and the killing of *L. patagonicus* by ranchers as pest-control (IUCN, 2014). Because their habitat is not well known, there also is the problem that conservation efforts may not be for the type of terrain that *L. patagonicus* inhabits (IUCN, 2014).

*L. patagonicus* is not collected from the wild for fur or meat and is rarely seen in the wild. Its range coincides with many protected areas in Argentina, namely Nahuel Hupi, Lanin, Lago Puelo, Los Alerces, perito Moreno, and Los Glaciares (IUCN, 2014). Most of these sites however are forested terrain instead of open terrain, such as the brush that *L. patagonicus* is thought to inhabit (IUCN, 2014).

There are no specific conservation attempts for the *L. patagonicus* that can be found in the literature available.

### Citations:

1. Kelt, D. & Pardinus, U. 2008. *Lyncodon patagonicus*. In: IUCN 2013. IUCN Red List of Threatened Species. Version 2013.2. Accessed February 10, 2014.  
<[www.iucnredlist.org](http://www.iucnredlist.org)>
2. Malek, K. 2003. "Lyncodon patagonicus". Animal Diversity Web. Accessed February 10, 2014 <[http://animaldiversity.ummz.umich.edu/accounts/Lyncodon\\_patagonicus/](http://animaldiversity.ummz.umich.edu/accounts/Lyncodon_patagonicus/)>
3. Schiaffini, Mauro; Martin, Gabriel; Giménez, Analía; Prevosti, Francisco. 2013. "Distribution of Lyncodon patagonicus (Carnivora, Mustelidae): changes from the Last Glacial Maximum to the present" *Journal of Mammology*, 94(2) pp339–350
4. Rusok, R. 1926 "The External Characters of the Patagonian Weasel (*Lyncodon patagonicus*). *Proceedings of the General Meetings for Scientific Buisness of the Zoological Society of London*, 1926 pp 1085-1094
5. Teta, Pablo; Prevosti, Francisco; Trejo, Ana. "Raptor predation and new locality records for the poorly known Patagonian Weasel (*Lyncodon patagonicus*) (Carnivora: Mustelidae)" *Mammilian Biology*, 73 pp 238-240
6. Serge Ouachée, "Patagonian Weasel" Photograph. *Wikipedia* Accessed February 10, 2014
7. National Park Services. "Long Tailed Weasel" Photograph. *NPS.org* Accessed March 10, 2014.
8. Sato, Jun; Wolsan, Mieczyslaw; Prevosti, Francisco; D'Elia, Guillermo; Begg, Colleen;

Begg, Keith; Hosoda, Tetsuji; Campbell, Kevin; Suzuki, Hitoshi. "Evolutionary and biogeographic history of weasel-like carnivorans (Musteloidea)" *Molecular Phylogenetics and Evolution* 2012. Vol. 63 pp 745-757.