


## Research Article

# Herpetofauna of Laguna Blanca National Park, Argentinean Patagonia: species list and conservation status

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**Academic editor:**

Alessandro Ribeiro de Moraes

Received: 13 November 2023

Accepted: 22 April 2024

Published: 17 June 2024

ZooBank: <https://zoobank.org/598A2B8B-0626-4282-9D1E-6462AD4BEE8E>

**Citation:** Rolón MCJ, Vera DG, De Los Santos FL, Harkes M, Tettamanti G, Calvo R, Di Pietro DO, Velasco MA, Avila LJ, Williams JD, Kacolis FP (2024) Herpetofauna of Laguna Blanca National Park, Argentinean Patagonia: species list and conservation status. *Neotropical Biology and Conservation* 19(1): 35–50. <https://doi.org/10.3897/neotropical.19.e115561>

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**Abstract**

Laguna Blanca National Park (LBNP) is located in the mid-west of Neuquén Province, Argentina. It was created in 1940 with the aim of conserving the nesting and breeding habitats of an important diversity of birds. Until now, there have been no exclusive works that address the herpetofauna present. The aim of this article is to provide an updated inventory of reptile and amphibian species in LBNP. We used four sources of information to create the species list: 1) data coming from field observations; 2) specimens deposited in herpetological collections; 3) scientific literature review; 4) online biodiversity databases. We confirm the occurrence of 18 species of herpetofauna in LBNP, including 13 reptiles and 5 amphibians. We also included six species with probable presence according to the range of distribution and habitat similarity. We added the conservation status of the national and international lists for each species. Five species are in some threat category at the national (Vulnerable, Endangered) or international level (Endangered, Critically Endangered). Seven taxa are listed as “Species of Vertebrates of Special Value” by the Administración de Parques Nacionales. Despite being protected within a national park, the herpetofauna present face threats such as prolonged drought events, habitat modification due to the presence of livestock, introduced exotic species, and emerging diseases. Conservation efforts are imperative to protect these species and mitigate their threats.

**Key words:** amphibians, biodiversity, inventory, Neuquén, protected areas, reptiles

**Introduction**

Laguna Blanca National Park (LBNP) is included in the Patagonian Steppe ecoregion, where plains with mostly smooth reliefs and extensive stepped plateaus prevail (Administración de Parques Nacionales 1999). It protects a particular sector of the Patagonian Steppe ecosystem, in the transition of the Western District and the Payunia District of the Patagonian Phytogeographic

Province (Oyarzabal et al. 2018). In addition, at the top of the volcanic cones, some species of the Altoandina Province grow (Morello et al. 2012). The convergence of these units gives this territory a unique conservation value, being underrepresented within the National Protected Areas system (Cibils and Borrelli 2005). In 1992, LBNP was declared a Ramsar site due to its importance as a feeding and breeding area for waterfowl. Besides, in 1995, it was declared one of the Important Bird Areas (IBAs) by BirdLife International, a global initiative program focused on the identification, documentation, and conservation of a network of critical sites for birds around the world (Administración de Parques Nacionales 2017).

Patagonia is recognized as a region with a significant concentration of endemic vertebrates (Lamoreux et al. 2006), with reptiles constituting a crucial element in the fauna (Morando and Avila 2020). Among reptiles, Patagonian lizards exhibit not just extraordinary species diversity but also a large number of endemisms (Chebez et al. 2005). The diversification of reptiles in arid environments is exemplified in Patagonia by the second-most diverse lizard genus, *Liolaemus* (Pincheira-Donoso and Scolaro 2007). Patagonian lizards represent approximately 8% of the whole diversity of lizards described for the Neotropics (Morando and Avila 2020). Regarding amphibians, the Patagonian region has a relatively small number of species; nevertheless, they possess attributes that grant them significant conservation value, such as a high degree of endemism (Úbeda and Grigera 2007).

There are documents that record the great diversity of birds within the park (Santos Gollan 1951; Paz Barreto 2018); nevertheless, there are still no exclusive works that address the herpetofauna present. At the regional level, there is a guide for northern Patagonian reptiles (Scolaro 2006), and Chebez et al. (2005) list the reptiles of Argentina's National Parks, including LBNP. Since then, new reptile species have been described within the park, such as *Liolaemus purul* (Abdala et al. 2012a) and *Phymaturus querque* (Lobo et al. 2010). Furthermore, other species were misidentified, such as *Diplolaemus darwini*, whose presence is mentioned within the park (Chebez et al. 2005), but, according to Cei et al. 2003, the populations found in LBNP correspond to *Diplolaemus sexcinctus*. Another example is *Liolaemus boulengeri*, which is mentioned for the park by Chebez et al. 2005, but its occurrence in the area corresponds to *Liolaemus sagei* (Etheridge and Christie 2003). More than 15 years have passed since these reptiles' lists, and considering the newly described species, an update is necessary. Regarding amphibians, there is no scientific work that addresses all the species present in the park, but the Management Plan for LBNP (Administración de Parques Nacionales 2017) lists the species known to occur there (*Atelognathus patagonicus*, *A. praebasalticus*, *Pleurodema bufoninum*, *Rhinella arenarum*, and *R. papillosa*). Furthermore, there are various papers related to the threatened frogs *Atelognathus patagonicus* and *A. praebasalticus* (Gallardo 1962; Cei and Roig 1968; Fox et al. 2005; Cuello and Perotti 2006; Fox et al. 2006; Úbeda and Grigera 2007; Martinazzo Giménez 2011; Cuello et al. 2017).

The area has several endemisms for both amphibians and reptiles (i.e., *Atelognathus patagonicus*, *Atelognathus praebasalticus*, *Liolaemus purul*, *Liolaemus sagei*, *Phymaturus querque*, and *Phymaturus zapalensis*), many of which are in some category of threat (Abdala et al. 2012b; Giraud et al. 2012; Vaira et al. 2012). One of the main objectives of Protected Areas is to maintain natural

conditions so that the species and biological communities they contain can thrive (Butchart et al. 2010). However, even within the park's boundaries, these species face various threats. Among the main threats faced by amphibians in LBNP are the presence of livestock that tramples the shores and drinks from the lagoons; exotic invasive fish; prolonged drought events increased by climate change; and the appearance of emerging diseases (i.e., ranavirus, chytridiomycosis; Fox et al. 2006; Cuello et al. 2014; Ghirardi et al. 2014). The main sub-population of the endemic frog *A. patagonicus* became extinct from Laguna Blanca lagoon, the largest and only permanent water body, after successive introduction events of invasive fish (Fox et al. 2005; Cuello and Perotti 2006; Ortubay et al. 2006; Kacoliris et al. 2022). In the case of reptiles, the threats they face within the park have not been studied yet but are probably related to habitat degradation caused by livestock activity and climate change (Böhm et al. 2016).

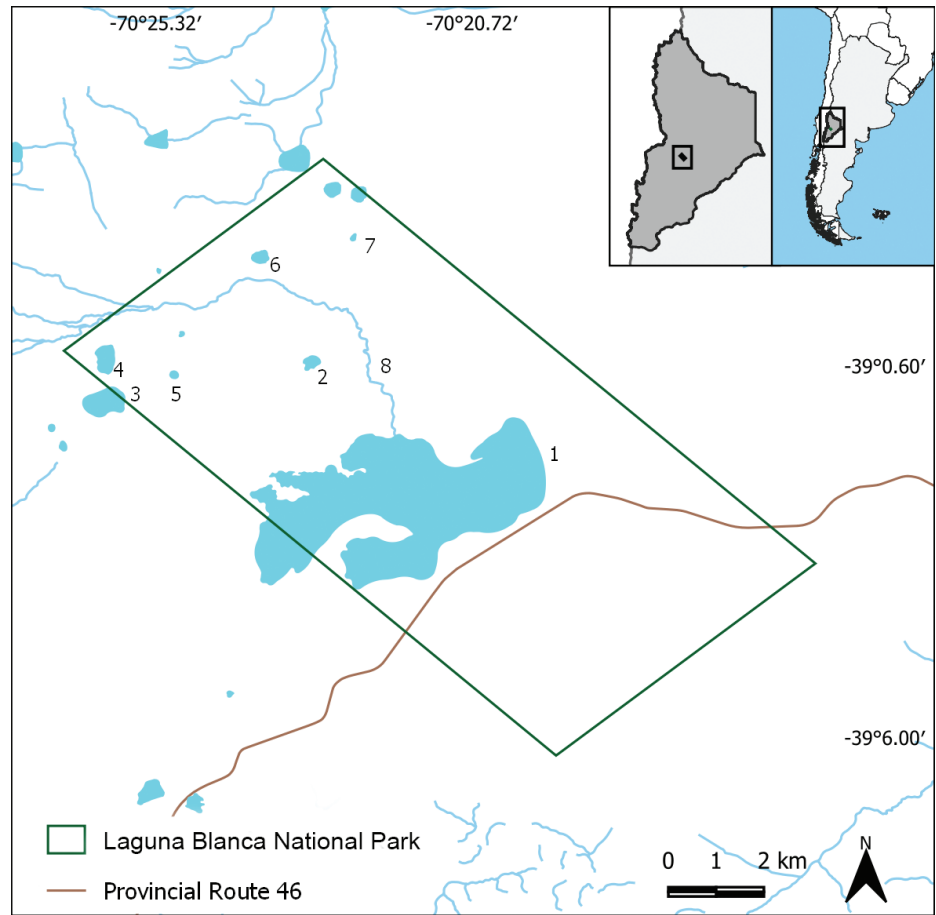
Knowing the species that occur in this area is the first step to conserving them. Checklists are an important tool to provide basic material for biogeographic and systematic studies, as well as information for decision-making in the management and conservation of wildlife (Droege et al. 1998). Herpetofaunal inventories should become a standard part of environmental assessment programs (Gibbons et al. 2000). The aim of this article is to present a complete current list of the amphibians and reptiles of the Laguna Blanca National Park in Argentinean Patagonia, with comments on the conservation status of each species.

## Methods

### Study area

Laguna Blanca National Park (39°2'14.81"S, 70°21'15.46"W) is located in the mid-west of Neuquén province, Argentina (Fig. 1) and includes an area of 11250 ha with an elevation of 1315 masl (Marcolín 1968). It was created in 1940 with the aim of conserving the nesting and breeding habitat of an important diversity of birds (Ramilo et al. 1993). The park gets its name from the largest permanent water body in the area, the Laguna Blanca (1700 ha), which is located mostly within its limits. In addition to this lagoon, eight others are located within the park, all much smaller and disconnected from each other, fed by underground infiltration and prone to desiccation in certain periods (Cei and Roig 1968). The occurrence of *mallines* is also notable. *Mallines* are wet meadows typically associated with river and stream courses or valley bottoms. In these areas, the high water availability determines a different physiognomy; the vegetation cover often exceeds 100%, and the dominant plants are mesophytic grasses (Poaceae, Juncaceae, and Cyperaceae) (Escobar 2011).

The terrain is rocky and rugged, with numerous volcanic cones interspersed with steep cliffs, basaltic walls, and rocky plains, dominated by the physiognomy of shrubby grassland steppe (Marcolín 1968). The climate is harsh, with hot, dry summers and cold, snowy winters (Conti 1998). The average annual temperature ranges between 8 and 10 °C, while the annual rainfall varies from 280 to 370 mm and is concentrated in autumn and winter (Administración de Parques Nacionales 2017). The aridity of the area where the park is inserted is attributed to climate and relief conditions as well as to the negative water balance derived from the scarcity of rainfall and high evapotranspiration (Daciuk 1968).



**Figure 1.** Laguna Blanca National Park in Neuquén Province, Argentina. **1** Laguna Blanca **2** Laguna Verde **3** Laguna del Overo **4** Laguna del Hoyo **5** Laguna del Molle **6** Laguna Antifir **7** Laguna Jabón **8** Llano Blanco Stream.

The vegetation is typical of steppe, low-growing, and thorny, characterized by “coirones” (*Pappostipa humilis* and *P. speciosa*), “neneo” (*Mulinum spinosum*), “molle” (*Schinus molle*), and “jarillas” (*Larrea* spp.) (Bonvissuto et al. 2008). Many of the plant species are endemic (e.g., *Adesmia neuquenensis*, *A. sandwithii*, *Heliotropium pinnatisectum*, *Nassauvia hillii*, *Senecio steparius*, *Viola columnaris*, and *V. escondidaensis*). Fifteen percent of the total species are exotic, and their presence within LBNP is related to grazing land use (Escobar 2011).

### Data collection

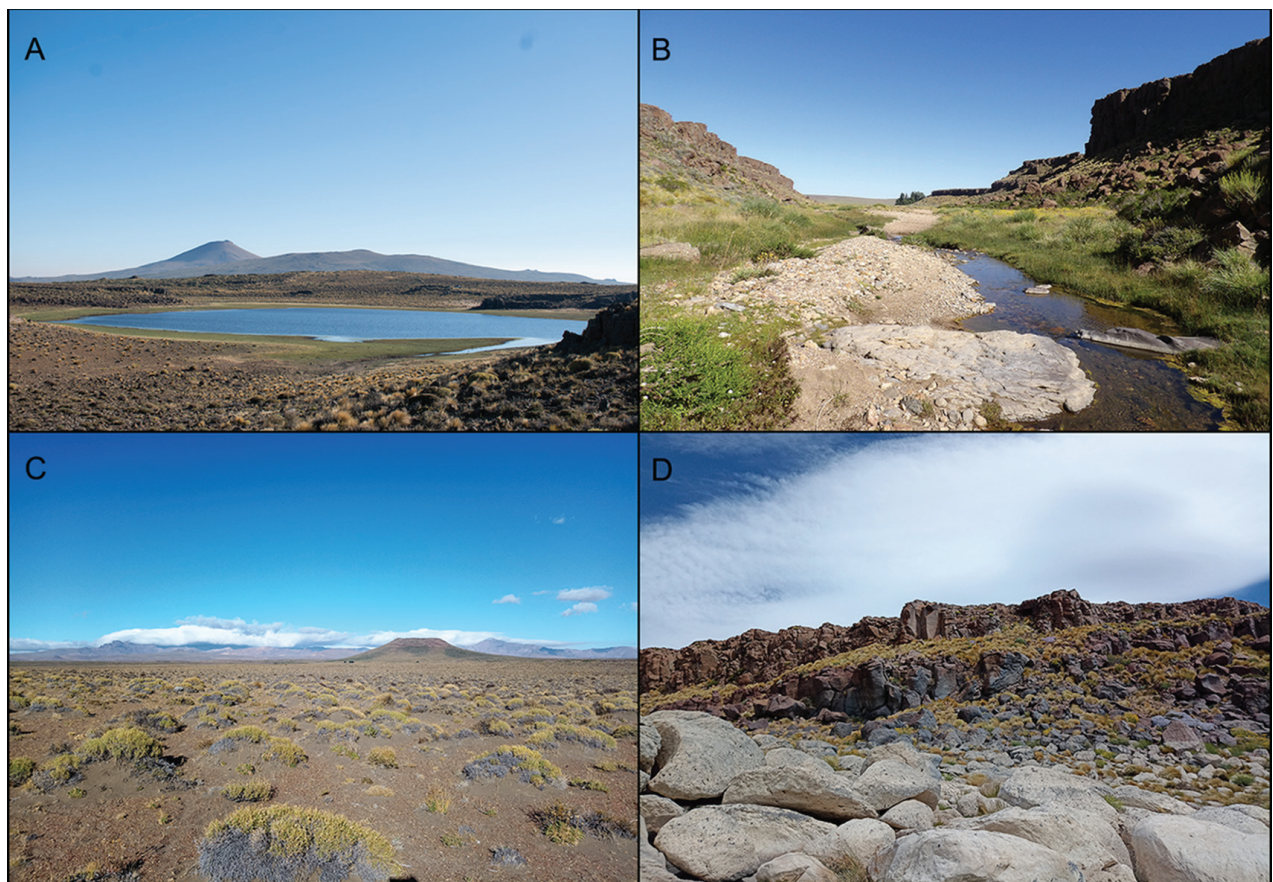
We used four sources of information to create the species list: 1) records from field observations; 2) voucher specimens and pictures deposited in the following collections: LJAMM-CNP (Luciano Javier Avila Mariana Morando Herpetological Collection, Centro Nacional Patagónico, Puerto Madryn, Argentina), MACN (Museo Argentino de Ciencias Naturales, Buenos Aires, Argentina), MLP (Museo de La Plata, La Plata, Argentina), FML (Fundación Miguel Lillo, San Miguel de Tucumán, Argentina); 3) review of the scientific literature; and 4) online biodiversity databases. We also included species with probable presence according to the distribution range (up to 100 km according to the IUCN



distribution maps) and habitat similarity. We add the conservation status of the national and international lists for each species.

For field records, we conducted surveys from October 2022 to March 2023. Four researchers carried out visual encounter surveys during the spring and summer at the following sites: Laguna del Hoyo (39°0'29.46"S, 70°26'1.68"W); Laguna del Overo (39°0'58.78"S, 70°25'53.92"W); Laguna del Molle (39°0'43.99"S, 70°25'3.42"W); Laguna Antiñir (38°59'2.46"S, 70°23'49.64"W); Laguna Jabón (38°58'43.94"S, 70°22'27.10"W); Laguna Verde (39°0'33.68"S, 70°23'1.85"W); Laguna Batea (39°2'3.71"S, 70°24'34.05"W). We also performed transects between lagoons and the Llano Blanco Stream. We searched for amphibians and reptiles on the shores of each lagoon for three hours, while each transect was tracked for two hours (totaling 223 hours per person). Fig. 2 shows the main types of environments sampled.

We reviewed varied literature, including checklists for Argentina and National Parks (Chebez et al. 2005; Avila et al. 2013), field guides and books (Scolaro 2006; Morando and Avila 2020; Abdala et al. 2021; Williams and Vera 2023), and other scientific articles (Etheridge and Christie 2003; Cei et al. 2004; Lobo et al. 2010; Abdala et al. 2012a). Furthermore, we gather data from the Administración de Parques Nacionales, such as the Management Plan for the Park (Administración de Parques Nacionales 2017).



**Figure 2.** Environments sampled in the Laguna Blanca National Park **A** Basaltic lagoon (Jabón) **B** Llano Blanco Stream **C** Shabby grassland steppe; **D**. Rocky areas.

We inspected the following online databases: iNaturalist (<https://www.inaturalist.org/>), Ecoregistros (<https://ecoregistros.org/site/index.php>), GBIF (<https://www.gbif.org/>), and IUCN (<https://www.iucnredlist.org/>). We filtered the records, discarding those whose photographs did not allow us to identify the species.

We followed Uetz et al. (2023) for the nomenclature and systematics of reptiles and Frost (2023) for amphibians. We followed the IUCN Red List for conservation status at the international level (<https://www.iucnredlist.org/>). The national conservation status for each species was obtained from the Argentinian Conservation Status Categorization for lizards (Abdala et al. 2012b), snakes (Giraudó et al. 2012), and amphibians (Vaira et al. 2012).

## Results

We documented a total of 18 herpetofauna species in LBNP, with 13 reptiles and 5 amphibians (Table 1; Fig. 3), all of which have corresponding records in the consulted bibliography. Among the voucher specimens examined from scientific collections, we found all these species except *Leiosaurus bellii*. However, our field surveys revealed only 12 species (10 reptiles and two amphibians). Finally, online databases provided records for 16 species (12 reptiles and four amphibians).

Reptile species are distributed into six families, viz., Amphisbaenidae, Colubridae, Leiosauridae, Liolaemidae, Phyllodactylidae, and Viperidae, whereas amphibians are included in three families: Batrachylidae, Bufonidae, and Leptodactylidae. The richest group are lizards (61%), followed by anurans (28%) and snakes (11%). The greatest herpetofauna richness was found near the lagoons.

Out of the 18 confirmed species, five are in some threat category at the national or international level: three reptiles (as Vulnerable) and two amphibian species (as Endangered, Critically Endangered, and Vulnerable). Threatened species represent 28% of the total species documented for the park. We included six probable species: two lizards, one amphisbaenian, and three snakes.

**Table 1.** List of reptile and amphibian species from Laguna Blanca National Park, Argentina. Presence: C (confirmed species); P (probable species). Source of information: A (bibliography); B (museum database); C (field survey); D (online database). Conservation status: CR (Critically Endangered); EN (Endangered, En Peligro); IC (Insuficientemente Conocida); LC (Least Concern); NA (No Amenazada); VU (Vulnerable). Dashes correspond to species not recorded during sampling.

Taxon	Presence	Source	Environment	Conservation status (global/argentine)
<b>Order Squamata</b>				
<b>Family Leiosauridae</b>				
<i>Diplolaemus sexcinctus</i>	C	A, B, C, D	near lagoons	LC / NA
<i>Leiosaurus bellii</i>	C	A	–	LC / NA
<i>Pristidactylus araucanus</i>	C	A, B, C, D	shrubby grassland steppe	LC / VU
<b>Family Liolaemidae</b>				
<i>Liolaemus bibronii</i>	C	A, B, C, D	near lagoons, shrubby grassland steppe	LC / NA
<i>Liolaemus elongatus</i>	C	A, B, C, D	near lagoons, rocky areas	LC / NA
<i>Liolaemus kriegi</i>	C	A, B, C, D	near lagoons, rocky areas	LC / NA
<i>Liolaemus lineomaculatus</i>	P	D	–	LC / NA
<i>Liolaemus purul</i>	C	A, B, D	–	LC / NA
<i>Liolaemus rothi</i>	P	D	–	LC / NA
<i>Liolaemus sagei</i>	C	A, B, C, D	near lagoons, shrubby grassland steppe	LC / NA
<i>Phymaturus querque</i>	C	A, B, C, D	rocky areas	LC / VU



Taxon	Presence	Source	Environment	Conservation status (global/argentine)
<i>Phymaturus zapalensis</i>	C	A, B, C, D	rocky areas	LC / VU
<b>Family Phyllodactylidae</b>				
<i>Homonota darwini</i>	C	A, B, C, D	rocky areas	LC / NA
<b>Family Amphisbaenidae</b>				
<i>Amphisbaena plumbea</i>	P	D	–	LC / NA
<b>Family Colubridae</b>				
<i>Paraphimophis rusticus</i>	P	D	–	LC / NA
<i>Philodryas patagoniensis</i>	C	A, B, C, D	near lagoons, shrubby grassland steppe	LC / NA
<i>Philodryas trilineata</i>	P	D	–	LC / NA
<i>Tachymenis trigonatus</i>	P	D	–	LC / IC
<b>Family Viperidae</b>				
<i>Bothrops ammodytoides</i>	C	A, B, D	–	LC / NA
<b>Order Anura</b>				
<b>Family Batrachylidae</b>				
<i>Atelognathus patagonicus</i>	C	A, B, C, D	near lagoons	CR / EN
<i>Atelognathus praebasalticus</i>	C	A, B	–	EN / VU
<b>Family Bufonidae</b>				
<i>Rhinella arenarum</i>	C	A, B, D	–	LC / NA
<i>Rhinella papillosa</i>	C	A, B, D	–	LC / NA
<b>Family Leptodactylidae</b>				
<i>Pleurodema bufoninum</i>	C	A, B, C, D	near lagoons, Llano Blanco stream	LC / NA



**Figure 3.** Reptiles and amphibian species of Laguna Blanca National Park, Argentinian Patagonia **A** *Diplolaemus sexcinctus* **B** *Pristidactylus araucanus* **C** *Liolaemus bibronii* **D** *L. elongatus* **E** *L. kriegi* **F** *L. purul* **G** *L. sagei* **H** *Phymaturus querque* **I** *P. zapalensis* **J** *Homonota darwini* **K** *Philodryas patagoniensis* **L** *Bothrops ammodytoides* **M** *Atelognathus patagonicus* **N** *Rhinella arenarum* **O** *R. papillosa* **P** *Pleurodema bufoninum*.

## Discussion

This work is the first checklist of reptiles and amphibians in Laguna Blanca National Park. We contributed to updating the checklist of reptiles from the National Parks of Argentina (Chebez et al. 2005), which also included 13 species, but many of them underwent changes in their taxonomy. Several species mentioned as confirmed for LBNP (Chebez et al. 2005; Administración de Parques Nacionales 2017) were excluded: *Diplolaemus darwini*; *Pristidactylus scapulatus*; *Liolaemus boulengeri*; *L. darwini*; *L. monticola*; *L. tehuelche*; and *Phymaturus palluma*, since they were assigned to new species or misidentified. *D. darwini* would correspond now to *D. sexcinctus* (Cei et al. 2003); *P. scapulatus* to *P. araucanus* (Cei et al. 2001); and *P. palluma* to *P. querque* (Lobo et al. 2010). The *Liolaemus* genus species we excluded correspond to *L. purul* (Abdala et al. 2012a) or *L. sagei* (Etheridge and Christie 2003).

We included six species based on probable presence determined through habitat similarity and the distribution range obtained from the IUCN distribution maps (<https://www.iucnredlist.org/>). *Liolaemus lineomaculatus* is native to the Patagonian phytogeographic province, inhabiting open areas with shrub vegetation. It has been documented in the provinces of Santa Cruz, Chubut, Río Negro, and Neuquén, with a record near the park (Christie 2002). *Liolaemus rothi* occupies various steppe habitats, ranging from rocky river washes to grass-bush communities, featuring different types of vegetation in valleys, slopes, and plateaus (Etheridge and Christie 2003). This species is found in the southwestern Neuquén Province at altitudes ranging from 700 to 1800 masl (Etheridge and Christie 2003). *Amphisbaena plumbea* is primarily found in the Monte ecoregion, extending from the province of Salta to Chubut (Montero 2016); however, there are a few records in Zapala, a locality very close to LBNP (Montero 1996). *Paraphimophis rusticus* occurs in a wide range of shrubland habitats and is mentioned in the central Neuquén province (Pérez et al. 2012). *Philodryas trilineata* is present in many Argentine provinces (Catamarca, Chubut, Córdoba, La Pampa, La Rioja, Mendoza, Neuquén, Río Negro, Salta, San Juan, San Luis, and Tucumán), mainly in the Monte phytogeographic region (Williams et al. 2021; Vera et al. 2023). *Tachymenis trigonatus* inhabits xeric shrub steppe (Scolaro 2005) and is found in the Monte phytogeographic region, extending into neighboring areas, reaching the provinces of Buenos Aires, Catamarca, Chubut, Córdoba, La Pampa, La Rioja, Mendoza, Neuquén, Río Negro, San Juan, San Luis, and Santiago del Estero (Avila 2009; Giraudo et al. 2012; Vera et al. 2023).

Reptiles with a Patagonian distribution represent 33% of the country, while about 40% of the species are endemic to Patagonia (Scolaro 2006). Most of the endemisms are attributed to the genera *Liolaemus* and *Phymaturus* (Morando and Avila 2020). Of the approximately 50 lizard species in the Neuquén province (Avila et al. 2013), 12 (24%) are protected within the park. In the case of snakes, their specific richness is scarce; there are 15 species in the province (Williams et al. 2021), and only two species (13%) are confirmed in this protected area. Lizards constituted the group with the highest richness and abundance of individuals found in the field, with Liolaemidae being the most numerous family. *Liolaemus elongatus*, *L. kriegi*, and the two species of *Phymaturus* were found associated with rocky areas; *Liolaemus bibronii* and *L. sagei* were found in bushes with sandy substrates in the shrubby grassland steppe.



The genus *Phymaturus* is unique within the Argentine herpetofauna since all the species are vulnerable on the national red list (Abdala et al. 2012b) based on their highly specialized biology, lifestyle (saxicolous), reproduction (viviparous), and diet (herbivore). In this context, the LBNP gains additional relevance by protecting two species of this genus, *Phymaturus querque* and *P. zapalensis*. Several studies have explored various aspects of *P. zapalensis*, encompassing reproductive biology (Boretto and Ibargüengoytía 2009), field thermal biology (Ibargüengoytía et al. 2008), and thermal preferences (Cruz et al. 2009). Moreover, comprehensive research on the thermal physiology of both *P. querque* and *P. zapalensis* has been conducted with individuals found inside LBNP (Duran et al. 2018; Cabezas-Cartes et al. 2023). It would be interesting to carry out studies to determine the status of the populations within the park.

All genera of leiosaurids are represented in LBNP: *Diplolaemus*, *Leiosaurus*, and *Pristidactylus*. *Diplolaemus* is the only lizard genus that is endemic to Patagonia. Individuals of *D. sexcinctus* were found under the peripheral rocks of the lagoons. Of the four *Leiosaurus* species, only one is exclusive to Patagonia, *L. bellii* (Avila et al. 2013), and it occurs in LBNP according to Chebez et al. (2005). Nevertheless, we did not find any specimens of *L. bellii* during the samplings. *Pristidactylus araucanus* is a poorly known species, with few records of occurrence and probably unclear taxonomic status. Its population density is low, with apparently isolated populations (Abdala et al. 2012b). During sampling, we only found one individual near rocks on sandy substrates.

Regarding amphibians, Argentinean Patagonia harbors about 30 species, with the highest richness concentrated in northern Patagonia (Úbeda and Grigera 2007). Of the 18 species present in Neuquén province, five (28%) are found in LBNP. *Rhinella arenarum*, *R. papillosa*, and *Pleurodema bufoninum* are common species with wide distribution. Despite both species of *Rhinella* being common, they have not been observed during samplings. It may be useful to conduct additional searches on sites not visited in our studies. However, several individuals of *P. bufoninum* were found beneath rocks in the Llano Blanco stream and around the lagoons.

*Atelognathus patagonicus* and *A. praebasalticus* are endemic species that inhabit basaltic lagoons in the center-west of Neuquén province. *A. patagonicus* has the peculiarity of having two morphotypes, one aquatic and the other littoral (Cei and Roig 1968). During samplings, we recorded individuals of *Atelognathus patagonicus* under rocks inside the lagoons and in peripheral areas. We were able to identify frogs exhibiting aquatic and littoral morphotypes.

The Patagonian Steppe is the ecoregion with the highest percentage (75%) of threatened amphibians in the country (Vaira et al. 2017). *A. patagonicus* was extremely abundant in the Laguna Blanca, the largest and only permanent water body (Péfaur and Duellman 1980), but from 1986 on it has not been observed at that site and was declared extinct for this lagoon (Fox et al. 2005). This situation is related to the introduction of invasive fish (mostly perch), which generated habitat loss, competition, and predation on frogs (Fox et al. 2005; Cuello and Perotti 2006; Ortubay et al. 2006). In addition, the appearance of clinical signs of *Ranavirus* sp. and *Batrachochytrium dendrobatidis* (Ghirardi et al. 2014), two pathogens frequently associated with the global decline of amphibians, was recorded for this species by Fox et al. (2006). For these reasons, *A. patagonicus* is currently categorized as Critically Endangered (IUCN SSC Amphibian Specialist Group 2019).

Of the 17 National Parks in Patagonia (<https://www.argentina.gob.ar/parquesnacionales>), LBNP is the second smallest (Úbeda and Grigera 2007), but it harbors approximately 20% of the species of reptiles (Abdala et al. 2012b) and snakes (Giraudó et al. 2012) and 30% of the amphibian species found in Neuquén province (Vaira et al. 2012). While species lists for reptiles exist for other Patagonian provinces such as Rio Negro (Pérez et al. 2011) and Chubut (Minoli et al. 2015), there is currently none available for the province of Neuquén. This is the first herpetofauna species list for a national park in Patagonia. Brizio et al. (2023) identified 16 reptile species in the Auca Mahuida Natural Protected Area, also located in the province of Neuquén. Despite being located about 200 km from LBNP, only four species are shared in both areas (*Diplolaemus sexcinctus*, *Leiosaurus bellii*, *Homonota darwinii*, and *Bothrops ammodytoides*), which is probably due to the fact that the Auca Mahuida Natural Protected Area encompasses the phytogeographical provinces of the Monte and Patagonia.

Of the 18 species recorded in our study, 7 are designated as “Species of Vertebrates of Special Value” (*A. patagonicus*, *A. praebasalticus*, *B. ammodytoides*, *P. araucanus*, *L. sagei*, *P. querque*, and *P. zapalensis*; Administración de Parques Nacionales 1994), constituting nearly 40% of the total herpetofauna found in the park. This designation is because they are in some category of threat, are endemic or specialists, or have a limited presence within the National System of Protected Areas. Given this situation, conservation efforts are imperative to protect these species and mitigate their threats. The ecological restoration of the Laguna Blanca stands as one of the primary objectives outlined in the current management plan of LBNP through continuous fishing (Administración de Parques Nacionales 2017). We recommend implementing measures to control livestock activities since cattle trample the shores, and we found the greatest herpetofauna diversity closely linked to the lagoons and their surrounding areas. The park has already carried out the fencing of some lagoons (Batea, Verde, and Antiñir), but cattle sometimes breach these barriers (pers. obs.). All of these actions are crucial for the restoration of the habitat and the preservation of the unique biodiversity within the park.

Our findings provide a starting point for future studies to explore additional aspects of the existing herpetofauna. While there are papers on certain biological aspects (Boretto and Ibargüengoytía 2009; Duran et al. 2018; Cabezas-Cartes et al. 2023), assessments at the status and population trend levels, particularly for reptiles, remain limited. In the case of amphibians, the most endangered species, *A. patagonicus*, has been the subject of ongoing research and various management actions in recent years (Cuello et al. 2008; Cuello et al. 2009; Cuello et al. 2017). Checklists are dynamic, reflecting the current state of knowledge at a specific moment (Rivas et al. 2012). Ongoing reports of new species, synonymizations, and other taxonomic changes are continually reshaping our understanding of biological diversity. To further validate the presence of probable species in the area, more exhaustive sampling across different seasons and sites not previously frequented will be necessary.

## Acknowledgements

We are very grateful to APN, Laguna Blanca National Park, and all park rangers for the necessary permits and help in this work (Hernán Pastore, Leonardo Buria, Emiliano Leonardi, Victoriano Curuhual, Claudia Carrizo, Rubén Frascoli,

Pablo Contreras, Fernando Zanona, and Jorge Blanco). We would like to express our appreciation for the valuable support rendered by the volunteers who contributed to the surveys (Camila Rua, Manuel Eirin, Camila Sagula, and Tomás Alvarez) and to Carmen Úbeda for sharing some photographs. We also thank the curators, technicians, and researchers in charge of or working in the collections of LJAMM-CNP (Luciano Avila, Mariana Morando), MACN (Julián Faivovich, Santiago Nenda), MLP (Leandro Alcalde), and FML (Marta Cánepa, Sebastian Barrionuevo). Finally, we thank the reviewers and editors for their valuable contributions and suggestions to improve the original manuscript.

## Additional information

### Conflict of interest

The authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

### Ethical statement

No ethical statement was reported.

### Funding

This study was supported by the Consejo Nacional de Investigaciones Científicas y Técnicas (CONICET PIP: 11220150100598CO; 11220200100803CO), the Fondo para la Investigación Científica y Tecnológica (PICT-2020-02428), Fundación Somuncura, the Mohamed bin Zayed Species Conservation Fund, and Idea Wild.

### Author contributions

Conceptualization: MCJR. Data curation: LJA, DGV, MCJR, FLDLS. Formal analysis: MCJR. Funding acquisition: MCJR, FPK. Investigation: RC, FLDLS, DGV, MCJR. Methodology: GT, MCJR. Project administration: MCJR. Resources: FPK. Supervision: FPK, DGV, JDW. Visualization: RC. Writing - original draft: MCJR. Writing - review and editing: FPK, MH, MAV, DODP.

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### Data availability

All of the data that support the findings of this study are available in the main text.

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