

Project Update: May 2013

From December 2012 to March 2013 we visited 123 sampling sites located in lakes (15), lagoons (18), rivers (67) and streams (23), within an area of 41 cells of 50 x 50 km. We drove almost 8,000 km to cover an area of 500 km and 270 km on the North-South and East-West axes respectively, reaching remote portions of Austral Patagonia in six different water basins (three running into the Pacific and the rest into the Atlantic Ocean). At each sampling point we searched for mink signs along transects of 600m. We could/were able to confirm mink presence in 21 cells (c. 52,500 km²) by determining 46 positive sampling sites (see figure). We consider that mink might be present at two additional cells but low detection power due to low densities prevented us from finding signs; thus a new search should be conducted there. We also identified cells that need proximate surveillance to detect mink colonisation. We worked at two current National Parks (Los Glaciares and Perito Moreno National Parks) and within an area that will be part of a new national park in brief (Patagonia National Park). We confirmed mink invasion at the three areas. At Perito Moreno National Park one, we found signs for the first time and in Los Glaciares National Park we found evidences of mink expansion to the south of the area where it was previously known to be present.

Mink occurs at several areas where hooded grebe breed (*Podiceps gallardoi*) and we witnessed the catastrophic outcome of mink attacks on two grebe colonies, which showed that immediate action regarding this situation is needed. The highest density of positive points for mink was found at the cell that involves an important area for torrent duck (*Merganetta armata*). The selected area for surveying more intensively mink at Austral rail (*Rallus antarcticus*) site was difficult to access, hence a more intensive work focused on this area is desirable in order to obtain a more accurate conclusion about the situation at this spot.

During fieldwork we contacted people associated to the area as landowners, ranch cattle workers, fishermen, park wardens, tourists and people living in small towns in the area. At each interview we aimed to make them aware of the impact of this invasive mammal on native species and poultry by presenting local cases and also experiences elsewhere. We showed them pictures and videos of the mink and their signs and pass on the huge importance of reporting its presence.

We are now analysing the information gathered during fieldwork to report this work results and conclusions framed in a brochure that will be posted and/or emailed to several stakeholders in the region in order to raise awareness of the problem.

Remoteness of several of the areas visited and enormous distances supposed logistic difficulties that we needed to face daily during fieldwork and prevented us from getting to some sites that we planned to survey. However, we consider that the objective was achieved. We succeeded at

generating a comprehensive baseline map of mink presence in Austral Argentinean Patagonia - where information about mink colonization was poor and scattered- and in particular at key areas for endangered birds that are preyed on by mink. The results of this work will be important for the next steps towards prioritization of areas for: (a) mink control and (b) prevention of new colonized areas.

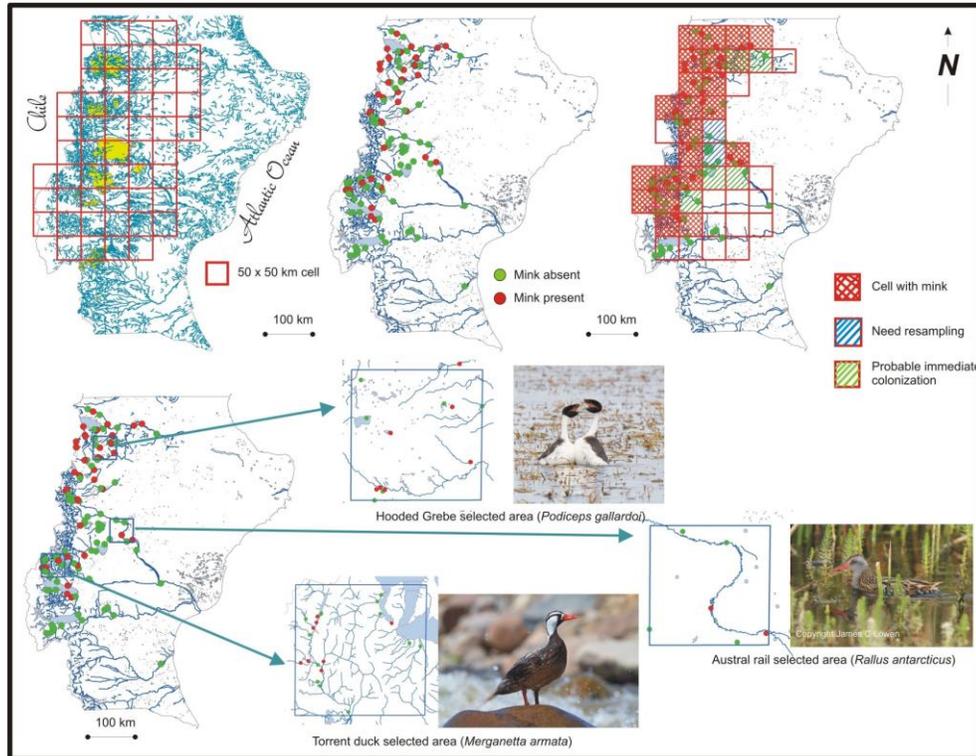


Figure showing Santa Cruz Province in Southern Argentinean Patagonia. A.- Santa Cruz Province with the initial grid. In yellow, the plateaus where *P. gallardoi* breeds. In blue the complete hydrological network. B.- Location of the surveyed points and results. In blue, only permanent water bodies and rivers. C.-cells occupied by mink, showing the extent of mink distribution in the region. D.-Detail of the areas of importance for the three species threatened by American mink that were selected.