

One of the last Kaweskars dies

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Alberto Achacaz Walakial, one of the last surviving members of the nomadic Kaweskar tribe that once plied the waters off Chile's Patagonian coast, has died of blood poisoning, local media reported on Tuesday.

Government documents listed Achacaz's age at 79, but some believe he was close to 90.

Experts estimate that only about a dozen full-blooded Kaweskars — or Alacalufes — survive and the group appears destined to disappear in the near future as there are no women of fertile age left.

Achacaz was hospitalized at the end of June in Punta Arenas, 2,175 miles south of Chile's capital, after appearing before doctors malnourished, dehydrated and weighing under 130 pounds, said Dr. Hector Gomez, director of the Armed Forces hospital. Septic shock affected his lungs and gall bladder.

Local newspaper La Prensa Austral reported that he died on Monday.

Achacaz lived alone in a modest home, which lacked a proper drainage system, after his wife died 11 years ago, the daily reported in January. He earned a living making small canoes of wool skins and weaving baskets.

About 6,000 years ago the Kaweskars inhabited the Patagonian channels and lived aboard their canoes. They were hunter-gatherers and ate mostly seafood and seabirds. It was not until the middle of the 20th century when the Kaweskars began establishing campsites on firm land, in Puerto Eden, a town on the Patagonian island of Wellington. Since the arrival of the first Europeans, Chile has lost five of its original 14 indigenous tribes to disease, displacement or the overuse of their natural resources