

New Zealand Trip Report 2024

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Day 1: Arrival

A 3pm meet and greet kicked off the tour in Auckland. We immediately started our transfer north to the town of Tutukaka for our pelagic excursion early in the morning where we enjoyed a great meal before calling it a night in preparation of the tour ahead!

Day 2: Tutukaka pelagic

Our tour began with an incredible pelagic boat trip from Tutukaka in the far North of Aotearora New Zealand's North Island. Wow.... rafts of seabirds a plenty with boil-ups of fish and seabirds together amongst the stunning back-drop of the Poor Knights Islands. At latitude (35°S) we were lucky to be in a prime location to see a diverse mix of seabird species including the New Zealand Storm Petrel (dancing on the waters-edge), Pycroft's Petrel, Grey-faced Petrel and two species of albatross with huge feeding work-ups of Buller's Shearwater and Fairy Prion. On our return inland we were greeted by a majestic pod of bottlenose dolphins the largest species in New Zealand waters. It is always a magical experience to see dolphins in their natural environment and we were fortunate to see three species in total on this countrywide tour. The group that stayed on land for the day had nice views of New Zealand Pigeon, Shining Bronze-Cuckoo, New Zealand Fantail and many of the non-native species that call New Zealand home.



Fairy Prion feeding frenzy © Rachel Hufton



Juvenile Black-browed Albatross © T Rosenmeier



New Zealand Storm-petrel © T Rosenmeier



Bottlenose Dolphin © Rachel Hufton



Tutakaka pelagic © Rachel Hufton

Day 3: Tutukaka

A nearby hotspot provided fantastic views of New Zealand Fernbird and fleeting views of a Spotless Crake. Afterwards, a brief stop at a nearby wetland added Australasian Grebe, Australasian Shoveler, New Zealand Scaup, New Zealand Grebe (dabchick) and Welcome Swallow, in addition to

great views of Paradise Shelduck and White-faced Heron. Red-billed Gull, Kelp Gull, Pukeko (Australasian Swamphen) and Masked Lapwing are already the usual suspects. .

Day 4: Trounson Kauri Park

A stunning visit to the mighty Trounson Kauri Park featuring an impressive stand of ancient kauri trees with complementary bird species including the migratory Shining Bronze Cuckoo, Tui, Kereru, Eastern Rosella and Morepork (New Zealand's indigenous owl species traditionally know as ruru) echoing its alternate contact calls through the remnant forest. The Morepork call was an unusual treat to experience during the day in the forest. Prior to this a good number of wader and tern species recorded at Waipu Wildlife Reserve including the endemic Northern New Zealand Dotterel. More endemics were also recorded at a nearby wetland site with Brown Teal, New Zealand Scaup, Australasian Little Grebe (native) with chick.

Day 5: Tiritiri Matangi

Our focus of the day was the predator-free island sanctuary of Tiritiri Matangi. It's an island conservation success story for species translocations and is located only a short ferry ride from the mainland. As we depart the ferry we are greeted by a beautiful chorus of bird song with New Zealand Bellbird, Tui, Grey Warbler and Red-crowned Kākāriki seen gliding between the flax buses. As we ascent up the hill into the reserve we are met by North Island Saddleback, a juvenile North Island Kokako, Stitchbird, flocks of Whitehead and charismatic Brown Quail running beneath our feet. Beyond the lighthouse we are met by a family of Takahe foraging amongst the shrubbery. The endearing juvenile seen well by all of us much to our delight. To finish we were blessed with excellent views of an adult female North Island Kokako before leaving the island. Her feathers a silky shade of silver grey with those blue wattles. We later found out that she had lost her mate last year and hadn't yet re-coupled.



Birding at Tiri Matangi © R Hufton



North Island Saddleback © T Rosenmeier



Kiwi Tour briefing © Rachel Hufton



North Island Brown Kiwi © Abram Tompkins

Day 6: Pukorokoro Miranda Shorebird Centre

Traveling south via Auckland (after finding Banded Rail) we arrive at Pukorokoro Miranda Shorebird Centre. A Ramsar designated wetland sites for Arctic migrants and the endemic Wrybill (the only bird in the world with a bill that bends to the right). Here flocks of Bar-tailed Godwit with Red Knot, Ruddy Turnstone, South Island Pied-oystercatcher and Wrybill were observed from the bird hide. A stop at the Miranda Field Center is always worth a visit for its collection of naturalist field guides, souvenirs and shorebird interpretation.



Wrybill © R Hufton

Day 7

New Zealand Kākā and Yellow-crowned Kākāriki provided numerous flyovers and fly-bys. North Island Robin was heavily abundant in the enclosed forests of the Central North Island. A Long-tailed Koel (cuckoo) was heard, but not seen.

Day 8: Tongariro National Park

The focus of the morning was on the Whio (Blue Duck), New Zealand's ancient waterfowl of cultural and spiritual significance. It delivered within minutes of our first stop at the Tongariro River. Excellent views of a pair were had at close range. Australasian Bittern was the next best addition for the day. A number of bitterns were sighted a short drive away from the Tongariro River, which is incredible considering it's a cryptic species and the extremely low population estimate across New Zealand. We concluded the day with sightings of nesting Nankeen Night Heron.



Tongariro National Park © Abram Tompkins

Day 9: Ferry to Picton

We concluded our time in the North Island today and proceeded to the South Island via ferry, but not before birding a few estuaries and getting our great views of Black-fronted Dotterel and Royal Spoonbill.



Interisland Ferry Crossing © Abram Tompkins

Day 10: Marlborough Sounds

A journey into the Marlborough Sounds with a stop at Blumine Island started our day. Along the way to/from Blumine Island we saw King Shag (only found in the Marlborough Sounds), Spotted Shag and Arctic Skua. When we disembarked at Blumine Island we immediately spotted a Weka, then shortly thereafter we added our target – the Orange-fronted Kākāriki. On the way to Kaikoura we encountered Hoary Headed Grebe, Glossy Ibis and Great Crested Grebe.



King Shags © R Hufton



Blumine Island departure © Abram Tompkins

Day 11: Kaikoura Pelagic

A morning boat outing granted us spectacular views of numerous pelagic birds, including Northern Giant Petrel, Salvin's Albatross, Northern and Southern Royal Albatross, Pintado (Cape) Petrel, Westland Petrel and Hutton's Shearwater. An afternoon search provided views of Little Owl.



Kaikoura rainbow © R Hufton



Kaihōura pelagic © Abram Tompkins

Day 12

We continued south down the east coast of the South Island. We had good views of Banded Dotterel, Wrybill, White-fronted Tern, Variable Oystercatcher, Pied Stilt and Black-billed Gulls.



Black-billed Gull © Abram Tompkins



Variable Oystercatcher © Tim

Day 13: Mckennzie country

After a stay in Christchurch, we headed off to the Mckennzie country in search of the rare Black Stilt also known as kaki (the rarest wader in the world population approx. 150 adult birds). Due to recent rainfall the Lake water levels were high and the kaki weren't at their usual spot so we persevered for a while. Our efforts were rewarded with a Kaki pair and later a recently released juvenile bird (as part of the NZ Kaki Recovery Program) recorded on the Tasman delta amongst the stunning backdrop of Aoraki Mt Cook (with its unusual late snow-cover for this time of year).



Black Stilt © R Hufton



Tasman delta, Black Stilt viewing © R Hufton

Day 14: Mount Cook

A visit to Mount Cook provided a pair of obliging Rifleman (on the ground), plus Tomtit and additional Black Stilt. Later on a nesting Baillon's (Marsh) Crake put on a show! The crake was seen walking through shallow wetland vegetation, foraging and collecting nesting material. This crake is

a beauty when seen well!

Day 15: Makarora

Makarora provided excellent views of Pipipi (Brown Creeper) flocks, Kereru and Riffleman within species rich beech/podocarp forest. The rare scarlet mistletoe just about to bloom.



Brown Creeper © T Rosenmeier



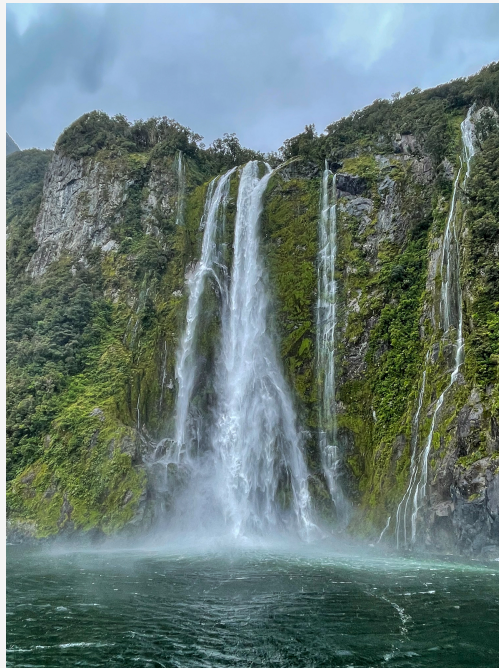
Brown Creeper watching © R Hufton

Day 16: Te Anua

Today we had a fleeting view of a New Zealand Falcon in rainy conditions along with all the regulars on our driving focused day.

Day 17: Fiordland National Park

An excursion into the expansive Fiordland National Park and a nature cruise in Milford Sound were on today's agenda. Spotless Crane and Fernbird were seen well at Mirror Lake and we had a splendid display of South Island Kākā flocks (10+) over a viewpoint coupled with tomtit and bellbird. The characteristic white head with contrasting red of this variant was seen most well and all were very happy with such close encounters of this endangered parrot. Kea calls and views were not far away either as we travelled further towards Hommer Tunnel. This is where New Zealand's alpine parrot the Kea was first experienced by the group. The always mischievous Kea nearly got into one of the vans. The glacial-carved fiords of Milford Sound and impressive falls were enjoyed by all. The South Island variant of Whio/Blue duck was seen clearly on the way back to Te Anua unfortunately conditions were unsuitable for the South Island (Rock) Wren to make an appearance although we did persevere on two occasions in rain and hail and chilly temperatures.



Milford Sound waterfall © Abram Tompkins



Fiordland National Park Lookout © R Hufton



South Island Kaka © S Oliver



Kea © S Oliver

Day 18: Stewart Island

We shifted to Stewart Island after a ferry delay. Northern Giant Petrel and Pintado Petrel were seen on the Foveaux Strait crossing. As soon as we arrived, we were greeted by South Island Kākā and Red-crowned Kakariki. An evening meander allowed great views of Little Penguin along with the sounds of Morepork and a few Southern Brown Kiwi.



Sea Lion at Stewart Island © Abram Tompkins

Day 19: Ulva pelagic

A pelagic to Ulva Island introduced us to the New Zealand sealion and our first views of Yellowhead/Mohua and South Island Saddleback on this predator free Island. South Island Robin was a regular sighting for this trip. Late afternoon we took a second pelagic where we saw a group of Fiordland Crested Penguins and an impressive colony of Foveaux Shag (Stewart Island shag). As dusk approached the soaring of White-capped Albatrosses against the sunset was magical. The beautiful wing patterns of the Pintado Petrel was noted as they flew alongside the boat whilst we headed to the nocturnal kiwi encounter site. At dark we headed into the forest where we found Southern Brown Kiwi foraging for insects amongst the undergrowth. The night sky was clear and majestic, perfect for stargazing as we carefully headed back to our craft for a night sail return to Oban and our accommodation, for our final night on this special island.



White-capped Albatross © R Hufton



Southern Brown Kiwi © M O'Neill

Day 20 - 21: Dunedin

A much more relaxed ferry crossing return was enjoyed back to Bluff. On the way Grey-back Storm Petrel was noted with Sooty Shearwater, Common Diving Petrel, White-capped Albatross and Fairy Prion. Around Dunedin we saw Tui and New Zealand Fantail, plus two Yellow-eyed Penguins. What a tour and what an awesome group of birders; species total 136 and great memories shared.



Allen's Beach, Otago Peninsula © S Oliver



Otago Peninsula © R Hufton

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