

New Zealand: North Island Itinerary

[Link: New Zealand: North Island](#)

Tour Overview

Our New Zealand: North Island birding tour explores a remarkable range of habitats and endemic wildlife. The North Island hosts 48 endemic bird species, including quintessential New Zealanders – Kiwis, as well as Kokako, Saddlebacks and Stitchbirds, the flightless Takahe, the scarce Blue Duck, and a wealth of seabirds including albatrosses, shearwaters, storm-petrels and petrels. New Zealand is a land of ancient forests – magnificent Kauri trees of immense historical importance, lush podocarp and temperate rainforests, and groves of splendid Tree Ferns.

Note: Beginning Nov 2026, our New Zealand Birding Tour will be split into 2 tours (North Island and South & Stewart Island) Itinerary

Itinerary

Day 1: Arrival in Whangarei



Our New Zealand birding tour begins today. We will meet after lunch, for a gentle introduction to New Zealand birding around Whangarei. We will visit Vinegar Lake to look for waterbirds such as New Zealand Grebe, Australasian Grebe, Australasian Shoveler, Grey Teal and Paradise Shelduck, and then Old Mill Wetland to look for Buff-banded Rail, Australasian Bittern and New Zealand Fernbird. Dinner and night in Whangarei.

Day 2: Hauraki Gulf pelagic birding trip



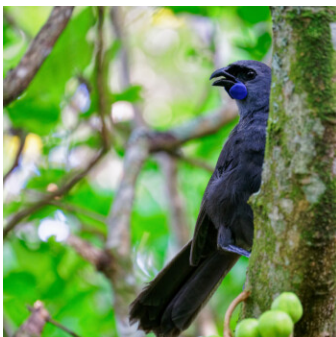
Today we'll embark on a full-day pelagic birding adventure in the outer Hauraki Gulf. Departing from Marsden Cove, we'll head northeast past the Hen and Chickens Islands to the deep waters of the gulf—an area known for its rich marine life and exciting seabird diversity. As we cruise these productive offshore waters, we'll keep our eyes peeled for an exciting mix of seabirds. Highlights may include New Zealand Storm-Petrel, Parkinson's Petrel, Buller's Shearwater, and Flesh-footed Shearwater, along with possible sightings of Cook's and Pycroft's Petrels, White-faced Storm-Petrel, Fluttering Shearwater, and Fairy Prion. There's always the chance of spotting something unexpected, and the presence of feeding flocks often draws in dolphins or even a passing whale. The trip lasts approximately 7.5 hours, returning in the late afternoon. If a full-day pelagic is not of interest, you can do some walking and exploring of Whangarei. Lunch on your own if you are not on the pelagic. Note that there is no discount if you do not participate in the pelagic. Night in Whangarei.

Day 3: Mangawhai Heads & Tawharanui Regional Park



Toward we will work our way south towards Warkworth. On the way, we will stop at Waipu Wildlife Refuge and Mangawhai Heads to look for New Zealand's rarest bird, the Australian Fairy Tern, of which only 45 individuals remain, along with other species such as Buff-banded Rail and various shorebirds such as the endemic Variable Oystercatcher and South Island Oystercatcher. We will visit Tawharanui Regional Park on the journey south to look for North Island Robin, Takahe, North Island Saddleback, Brown Teal and Whitehead. After dinner we will be making a special night excursion to the Tāwharanui Regional Park for our first chance to see a kiwi! North Island Brown Kiwi and Morepork are our targets for this evening outing. Night in Warkworth.

Day 4: Tiri Tiri Matangi Island



Today we take the boat ride to Tiri Tiri Matangi Island—one of the greatest bird conservation success stories in New Zealand. What was once an overgrazed islet supporting little birdlife, is now a predator-free sanctuary covered in native plants, all supporting a vibrant bird community including some of the countries rarest endemics like Stitchbird, North Island Kokako, and the iconic Takahe (giant flightless swamphen), as well as North Island Saddleback and Red-crowned Parakeet. If the weather permits, back on the mainland we will visit Shakespear Regional Park in search of Spotless Crake and Buff-banded Rail, before heading back north towards Warkworth. Dinner and night in Warkworth, with an option to return to look for North Island Brown Kiwi in Tawharanui again if needed. Night in Warkworth.

Day 5: Pukorokoro Miranda Shorebird Centre



Make the journey south to the amazing spectacle of waders at Miranda/Pukorokoro Shorebird Centre. Our day will be partially organized around the high tide here. The coastal mudflats and saltmarsh of Miranda (NZ's most famous shorebird hot spot) support Bar-tailed Godwits (who fly non-stop from Alaska—11,000+km—to winter here!), Red Knot, Sharp-tailed Sandpiper, Red-necked Stint, Wrybill, Red-breasted Dotterel, Buff-Banded Rail, Pied Oystercatcher, Pied Stilt, Pacific Golden Plover and White-fronted Tern. If we're lucky, there might be a few other Siberian waders, such as Marsh Sandpiper or Greater Sand Plover. We will then head to Piako Wader Roost, which often hosts rare waterbirds among good numbers of Royal Spoonbill, Paradise Shelduck and Grey Teal. We will continue south to Turangi for dinner and the night.

Day 6: Turangi



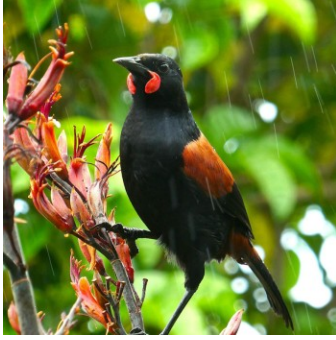
We will spend the morning birding around Turangi. We will visit Turangi Bridge to look for Blue Ducks (or "Whio")—a highly specialized endemic of NZ's mountain rivers, followed by Tokaanu Historic Wharf to look for Australasian Bitterns and Spotless Crakes. Late morning, we will drive (2.5hrs) to Upokongaro for a late lunch. There is a lovely cafe there where you can see New Zealand's only Nankeen Night Herons roosting above the tables in the garden. Night in Whanganui.

Day 7: Whanganui



We will begin our day with a visit to Bushy Park Sanctuary near Whanganui, with a good chance of finding Stitchbird, North Island Saddleback and more. We will then journey south towards Foxton Beach and Manawatu Estuary to look for waders and other waterbirds. Continuing south towards Wellington, we will visit various forests and wetlands on the way to look for birds like Black-fronted Dotterel, Spotless Crake and Sulphur-crested Cockatoo. After dinner will go on the Zealandia night tour to look for Little Spotted Kiwi and Tuatara. Night in Wellington.

Day 8: Zealandia



This morning we will bird at Zealandia, a wonderful bird reserve near the centre of Wellington. Target birds will include Takahe, North Island Saddleback, Stitchbird, Kaka, Red-crowned Parakeet, Pied Cormorants, Little Pied Cormorants, and Black Cormorants. After lunch, we may visit Te Papa, New Zealand's national museum, which has an incredible array of natural history exhibits, or visit Plimmerton to find rare Terns and Jaegers, or other wetlands near the city in search of Crakes and other waterbirds. If you are not joining us on the New Zealand: South & Stewart Island tour, this will be our final dinner together with the group. Night in Wellington

Day 9: Departure OR continue on South & Stewart Island Tour

Our New Zealand: North Island birding tour concludes this morning. If you are not joining us on the South Island tour, you can depart anytime today. If you are joining us for the New Zealand: South & Stewart Island Tour, you have a free day to enjoy Wellington. We will meet the new guides and guests for dinner.

What to Expect

Overview

The New Zealand birding tour is a moderately paced trip. You can expect some early morning, pre-breakfast walks, as well as three optional evening forays to look for kiwis and possibly owls. Please note that our guides will not be using laser pointers on this tour due to local regulations.

Food

We generally have breakfast at the hotel before we head out for the day. Sometimes we will have optional pre-breakfast walks. We often take a picnic lunch in the field, but will occasionally stop at a restaurant or cafe for lunch. Dinner is usually at a restaurant close to the lodgings. Each evening after dinner we compile the day's checklist, review the day's activities, birds, mammals and other observations, and plan the next day's activities.

Accommodation

Generally we stay in basic or standard hotel or motel rooms in locations close to where we want to go birding.

Walking

The tour will generally involve easy to moderate walking, however, night-time forays may involve some steep inclines in the dark. When at higher elevations, we keep our walking to a slow pace, doing most of our observation from the vehicle. In general, we keep all our nature study to a reasonable pace, maximizing the number of things we see and allowing enough time to properly enjoy them.

Driving

There will be a number of long drives, as we travel the length of the North Island. We will take frequent rest stops, and enjoy scenic viewpoints along the way. Expect to travel on winding, mountainous roads, which can be challenging for those prone to motion sickness—consider bringing medication or other remedies if needed.

Climate

Prepare for everything! The North Island is mild, with temperatures ranging from lows of about 10°C (50°F) to highs of 24°C (75°F). Be prepared for cold winds, which can make conditions feel cooler than the actual temperature. Rain is also likely, especially on the west coast. The pelagic trip is likely to feel quite cool due to coastal winds, so it is best to dress in layers. New Zealand's weather can change rapidly and may occasionally impact road conditions and access. Flexibility is key, as we may need to adjust the itinerary to ensure a safe and smooth journey.

Boat Trips

North Island Pelagic Tour

We will be birding an area 6-8 miles North East of the Chick's Islands group. Our vessel, a stable 14-meter (45-foot) boat, accommodates 23 passengers plus two crew members, including the skipper. While generally comfortable, conditions at sea can be rough depending on wind speed. Stronger winds often result in more bird activity, but they can also create choppier waters. If you are prone to motion sickness, we highly recommend taking preventative medication before departure. The boat is well-equipped with a full galley, including a fridge and facilities for coffee and tea. There is a lavatory on board, along with ample undercover seating and tables for cameras, field guides, and other gear.

What's Included

Tour Price Includes

- Kiwi excursions included (weather permitting)
- All accommodations (Moderate to good quality hotels and lodges)
- All meals and soft drinks
- Ferry and pelagic boat trips included
- Ground transportation
- Guides: 4 - 7 participants with one guide and vehicle, 8 - 12 with two guides and vehicles

Tour Price Does Not Include

- Travel to and from start/end location
 - Travel Insurance
 - Items of a personal nature
 - Alcoholic beverages
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