

NEW ZEALAND

NEW ZEALAND NOVEMBER 27/DECEMBER 22 2009

This was our first full birding tour of New Zealand including North, South, Stewart and Chatham Islands. It was an outstanding success recording 167 species including 72 endemic birds and 42 seabirds including terns and cormorants. The vast majority of the accessible key species were seen with the only miss being Okarito Kiwi which was down to weather conditions. The highlights were many and scattered throughout the trip with the Southern Brown Kiwi experience on Stewart Island and the squabbling Chatham Albatross off the Pyramid Rock coming to mind. The following trip report and bird list should bring back many happy memories of an excellent tour of New Zealand.

My thanks go out to Brent Stephenson (Wrybill Birding Tours, NZ) for organising and running the tour, without his expertise and knowledge of New Zealand's birds and particularly the seabirds the tour would not have been the success it was. Once again thank you to Brent for the driving, guiding and well being of the group. In total we travelled just under 6000km excluding the Chatham Islands.

The next scheduled tour is in January 2012

November 27th-29th: London, Los Angeles, Auckland, Waitakere, Muriwai Beach, Straka's Lagoon, Waiwera Beach, Trounson Kauri Park

Daily total 49 New trip birds 49 Running total 49

Weather: Overcast with occasional showers and sunny spells, 21c

The majority of the group met up at London Heathrow Terminal 1 for the long flight down to Auckland via Los Angeles. The flight went smoothly and arrived on time in Auckland just before 7am on the 29th. After passing through immigration and customs we met up with Brent our guide for the next three weeks. Our first birds in and around the airport car park included Common Myna, European Greenfinch, House Sparrow, Eurasian Blackbird and brief views of White-faced Heron. En route to Auckland we picked up John from Long Beach in California and Barry from Sydney in Australia. On the way to Waitakere we recorded Masked Lapwing, Song Thrush, Welcome Swallow, and in the wetter areas Pied and Little Pied Cormorants. Roadside wires attracted Spotted Dove whilst open areas had Australian Magpies. Before entering Waitakere a short stop added the endemic Tui, Grey Gerygone, European Goldfinch and Yellowhammer. The natural forest at Waitakere is accessed by a rough track running through a golf course. On the latter grassy areas held Eastern Rosellas, Purple Swamphen and California Quails. From the parking area we observed our first New Zealand Pigeons, Sacred Kingfishers and Silvereyes. Next on the agenda was Muriwai Beach home to a large colony of Australasian Gannets which have increased in numbers over the last decade. On cliffs and beaches we watched Kelp and Red-billed Gulls, White-fronted Terns and Variable Oystercatchers. Picked up a picnic lunch in Helensville and consuming it next to Straka's Lagoon an ideal spot to observe waterbirds. Interesting species present included New Zealand Grebe, Pacific Black Ducks, Grey Teal, Australian Shoveler, New Zealand Scaup, and Mallard. The countryside here held huge numbers of Swamp Harriers, Australian Magpie, Eurasian Skylark and Paradise Shelducks. A short stop at Waiwera Beach added the Southern Pied Oystercatcher (in North Island). Time was getting on as we arrived at Trounson our base for the evening. In the gardens we were entertained by Eastern Rosellas and a New Zealand Fantail. After dinner we embarked on a night tour to Trounson Kauri Park with a local guide. This was simply a wonderful experience as we wandered around boardwalks and paths searching for anything of interest. Luck was with us as a Northern Brown Kiwi showed well before disappearing into deep cover. Other interesting things included the history of the Kauri tree, a Long-finned Eel living in almost no water but partial to cheese!! Further along the trail Banded Kokupu, New Zealand Freshwater Crayfish and cave-dwelling Cave Wetos. On returning to base we located Morepork in the motel grounds.

NEW ZEALAND

November 30th: Trounson, Teal Bay, Waipu Estuary, Waipu Caves, Mangawhai Heads, Warkworth

Daily total 52 New trip birds 13 Running total 62

Weather: Overcast with occasional showers 24c

A later departure after the long travel day from Europe. Usual birds around the gardens at Trounson before we headed towards Teal Bay on the east coast. The road was rather winding and slow making the journey appear longer than it was. On arrival we flushed a Great Cormorant from the river. Our main interest here was the globally-threatened Brown Teal which duly obliged at close range. Other interesting species present included Pied Stilt and Paradise Shelduck. The next stop was further south at the Waipu River an important site for summering shorebirds and resident waders. Familiar species included Bar-tailed Godwit, Ruddy Turnstone, Red Knot and Caspian Tern. Careful scanning revealed several Red-breasted Dotterels an uncommon New Zealand endemic. Nearby a small pool attracted several Black Swans. After lunch we headed inland to a small pool at Waipu Caves which provided us with excellent views of Australasian Little and New Zealand Grebes. We ended the day birding around Mangawhai Heads an area of inter-tidal mud flats and mangroves. Near the pub distant views of Fairy Tern resting on a mud bar, unfortunately it flew off towards the ocean. We drove a short distance to watch over another section of the lagoon near a road bridge. Chris located an Australasian Bittern feeding in the open allowing all of us excellent views of this normally shy and skulking species. We waited a while with views of a Fairy Tern flying in front of a section of woodland. The drive down to Warkworth went smoothly and quickly our base for the next two nights.

December 1st: Sandspit, Hauraki Gulf, Mokohinau Islands, Kawau Island

Daily total 49 New trip birds 19 Running total 81

Weather: Overcast with light northerly winds 19c

An earlier start today as we made the short journey down to Sandspit the departure point into the Hauraki Gulf. The gulf is interspersed with several islands and rich for a wide range of seabirds. Before we entered the gulf several species were noted including Little Penguin, Australasian Gannet, Red-billed Gull and Little Pied Cormorant. The first sector nearest to land attracted Fluttering and Flesh-footed Shearwaters and several Common Diving Petrels. Brett our skipper stopped again and dropped anchor before starting to chum. This proved to be a very productive spot for Buller's Shearwaters, Fairy Prion, Cook's and Parkinson's Petrels and White-faced Storm Petrels (dozens) dancing over the water. Rare to unusual birds attracted to the chum were Pycroft's Petrel, Short-tailed shearwater and the recently rediscovered New Zealand Storm Petrel. Excellent views of Little Shearwater were had as we steamed. The seas were quite choppy as we approached the Mokohinau Islands to stop for lunch in the lee of the island. On the main island we watched Red-fronted Parakeets, Tui, Sacred Kingfisher, and a Swamp Harrier. After lunch we sailed past a further two islands holding gannets, gulls and terns before stopping again in a deep water area. Chumming here added White-capped Albatross and Sooty Shearwater plus many of the birds seen earlier in the day. On the journey back to Sandspit a short diversion to Kawau Island added Weka feeding along the shoreline and New Zealand Pigeon and Eastern Rosella in fruiting trees. On our return to Warkworth short diversions for the localised and uncommon Laughing Kookaburra a fitting end to a truly fantastic birding day.

December 2nd: Warkworth, Wenderholm, Tiritiri Matangi

Daily total 51 New trip birds 15 Running total 96

Weather: Overcast with occasional rain showers 18c

Checked out at Warkworth and made the short drive down to Wenderholm. On arriving at Wenderholm we made a short exploration of fields and marshes adjacent to the road. The commoner species present plus a Buff-banded Rail spotted by Chris in a small pool. Afterwards we continued south towards the ferry terminal

NEW ZEALAND

at Gulf Harbour. The jetty here held Pacific Reef Egret, Variable Oystercatcher, Kelp Gull and Pied Cormorant. The ferry crossing to Tiritiri Matangi produced Fluttering Shearwaters, White-fronted Terns and a vagrant South Polar Skua. On arrival at Tiritiri we joined the trail towards the lighthouse passing through natural forest. Before the first pool Brown Quail were feeding on a recently mowed track. By the pool a pair of Brown Teal was observed and a Spotless Crake walked quietly through the undergrowth. The trail was excellent as we located Red-fronted Parakeet, North Island Saddleback, Fernbird, Stitchbird, Kokako, New Zealand Bellbird and the North Island race of New Zealand Robin. Arrived at the bunkhouse our accommodation for the night situated near the lighthouse. By the visitor centre a Takahe a rather prehistoric looking flightless rail. The weather started to worsen with heavy rain showers. Late afternoon walk back towards the jetty. At the pool we located a different Spotless Crake (juvenile). On our return journey excellent views of Stitchbird and New Zealand Bellbirds at a feeding station. After dinner was taken we embarked on a night walk at 2030 hours. Poor weather conditions prevailed throughout the next three hours. Luck was on our side as a Little Spotted Kiwi gave good views in the open on a track. Overhead we could hear calling Fluttering Shearwaters and Cooks Petrels. On the return walk a Little Penguin slid down a wet track past us. The last bird was a calling Morepork, back to base a rather wet and bedraggled group.

December 3rd: Tiritiri Matangi, Waitakere, Mangere Sewage Farm, Miranda

Daily total 73 New trip birds 10 Running total 105

Weather: Overcast with showers, northeast wind 17c

A later departure this morning as walked down to the jetty to catch a water taxi back to the mainland. From the jetty we observed a pair of Fernbirds, Red-breasted Dotterel, Caspian Tern and Arctic Skua. Arrived on the mainland and headed towards Waitakere which we visited on the first day. Similar birds here to our previous visit plus a singing Dunnock. Our next stop was Mangere Sewage Farm a series of lagoons close to the international airport. Species seen here today included Little Black Cormorant, Pacific Black Duck, Mallard, Grey Teal, Australian Shoveler, Black Swan, Sacred Kingfisher and Pied Stilt. The tide was ebbing exposing sections of mud attractive to Bar-tailed Godwit, Red Knot and some distant Royal Spoonbills. Our journey south continued until reaching Miranda and its world famous estuary and shorebirds. Checked our bags in at the Miranda Motel followed by a visit to the Shorebird centre and birdwatching areas. On the first muddy lagoon a group of Pacific Golden Plovers showed well an uncommon summer visitor to New Zealand. On the Stilt Pool we located Wrybills and Sharp-tailed and Curlew Sandpipers. We ended the day watching thousands of waders being pushed up by the tide towards us. The most numerous birds were Bar-tailed Godwits and Red Knots. Among these were Little and White-fronted Terns, Red-billed and Black-billed Gulls and a single Red-necked Stint. Returned to base via a fish restaurant for an evening meal.

December 4th: Miranda, Whangamarino, Pureora, Whakamaru, Turangi

Daily total 60 New trip birds 10 Running total 114

Weather: Overcast with showers plus a cool northeast wind 13c

First stop today was at the Stilt Pool at Miranda where the high tide was forcing birds to roost. Bar-tailed Godwits and Red Knot present in their thousands but no sign of the summering Hudsonian Godwit. We headed inland to another wetland area at Whangamarino which was situated in a flooded river valley dotted with bushes and old shooting butts. Careful scanning revealed up to four Australasian Bitterns, Australian Shoveler, Grey Teal and Great Cormorants. Pureora was next a forest area of natural and commercial trees. On the entrance track Long-tailed Koel. At the next stop we found a New Zealand Pipit feeding on a grass verge. Also present in the immediate vicinity were New Zealand Pigeon, Tui, Grey Gerygone, Tomtit and hunting Swamp Harrier. Lunch followed by a visit to a section of forest which was productive for Common Redpoll, Silvereye, Whitehead, New Zealand Robin and New Zealand Bellbirds. Brent drove us to another

NEW ZEALAND

section of forest with an observation tower. This proved to be a good spot for the North Island race of Kaka, Yellow-fronted Parakeet and a Rifleman spotted by Roger flitting through the trees. We eventually caught up with Bronze Shining Cuckoo albeit in flight. Time was pressing as we travelled towards the resort of Turangi. A short stop at a series of lakes produced Canada Goose, Eurasian Coot, New Zealand Scaup, Black Swan and Little Pied Cormorants. Checked in for the night at Turangi.

December 5th: Turangi, Tokaanu Lake, Rangipo Intake, Ruatiti Domain, Vinegar Hill, Woodville, Palmerston North

Daily total 51 New trip birds 3 Running total 117

Weather: Overcast with sunny spells in the afternoon 16c

The motel gardens held the commoner species. After breakfast we headed to a lakeside stop where we quickly located Fernbirds at close range in the long grasses. A Shining Bronze Cuckoo showed well in a bare bush. Tokaanu Jetty was next on our agenda and the boat ramp area which offers good views over the lake and surrounding marshes. Black Swans were common here with other species of note including New Zealand Grebe, New Zealand Scaup, Little Black, Little Pied and Great Cormorants and Black-billed Gulls.. We left Turangi and made a short stop at Rangipo Intake an area of fast-flowing river dotted with boulders. A nice surprise was a Blue Duck allowing good scope views. The forest here had Whitehead, New Zealand Bellbird, Tui, Silvereye and New Zealand Pigeon. Rejoined the main highway and turned off again into the Ruatiti Domain Valley a beautiful area of rivers, forest and cliffs intermingled with farm land. The river here held substantial numbers of the endangered Blue Duck with their ducklings, fantastic views of this New Zealand endemic. Above the picnic tables a pair of New Zealand Fantails had built a nest in a fir tree. In the afternoon we headed towards the small country town of Feilding via Vinegar Hill. Chris spotted Sulphur-crested Cockatoos feeding in a bare tree another uncommon and localised species introduced to New Zealand. The farm land here had good numbers of Wild Turkey and Ring-necked Pheasant and the ever-present Australian Magpies. A thorough search around the community of Woodville did not reveal any Rooks another uncommon introduction from the nineteenth century. At the end of the day a short visit to Palmerston North where we located Mute Swan, Canada Goose, Mallard and Eurasian Coot. A long day had come to an end with the Blue Ducks being the avian stars.

December 6th: Feilding, Manawatu Estuary, Otaki, Waikanae, Wellington, Cook Strait, Picton

Daily total 63 New trip birds 5 Running total 122

Weather: Overcast with northwest winds 18c

We left Feilding after breakfast and travelled down to the Manawatu Estuary an important area for summering waders. On arrival we located a group of Royal Spoonbills feeding on an ebbing tide. Other waders present included Pacific Golden Plovers, Red-necked Stint, Ruddy Turnstone, Sharp-tailed Sandpiper, Bar-tailed Godwit and Red Knot. Next on the agenda was Otaki Sewage Lagoons a small fenced area surrounded by a gravel habitat. The latter held the uncommon Black-fronted Dotterel. On the lagoon parties of Black Swan, New Zealand Grebe, Grey Teal, Australasian Shovelers, Paradise Shelducks and Greylag Goose. Further south we made a short visit to Waikanae a series of pools and beach area. A few birds observed including New Zealand Scaup, Variable Oystercatcher and White-fronted Terns. Time was pressing a little as we headed to Wellington the capital city of New Zealand. In the harbour we located Little Penguin, Spotted Shag, Kelp and Red-billed Gulls and a pod of feeding Short-beaked Common Dolphins. Boarded the ferry to cross the Cook Straits and onto Picton, situated at the northern end of South Island. Seawatching from the ferry produced White-capped Albatrosses, Cook's, Great-winged and Westland Petrels, Northern Giant Petrel, Sooty Shearwater and Fairy Prions. We entered the sheltered waters of Queen Charlotte Sound

NEW ZEALAND

recording Australasian Gannets, Arctic Skuas and a single Rough-faced Shag. Arrived in Picton and booked in for the night.

December 7th: Queen Charlotte Sound, Motuara Island, Waihopai Valley, Blenheim Sewage Lagoons, Lake Grassmere, Ohau Point, Kaikoura

Daily total 57 New trip birds 5 Running total 127

Weather: Sunny with warm northerly winds 24c

We started the day with a boat trip into Queen Charlotte Sound adjacent to the small town of Picton. In the harbour we located Spotted Shags and Little Penguin. Our journey took us into sheltered areas of water holding Fluttering Shearwaters, Australasian Gannets, White-fronted Terns, Arctic Skuas and the rare Rough-faced Shag the latter numbering only around 800 birds. We also recorded Bottled-nosed and Hector's Dolphins the latter being an endangered species endemic to New Zealand. A short stop at Motuara Island added New Zealand Bellbird, Yellow-fronted Parakeet and the South Island races of New Zealand Robin and Saddleback both likely to attain full species status in the coming year. Picked up packed lunches at the Dutch Bakery in Picton and travelled through Marlborough vineyard country to the Waihopai Valley. After a short wait we located the long-staying Black Kite hunting low over a stand of trees. Next on the agenda was a visit to the sewage lagoons at Blenheim an important reserve for wetland birds. A well vegetated island held c250 Royal Spoonbills plus a Glossy Ibis located by Mike, this is an uncommon bird in New Zealand with most birds originating from Australia. On the lagoons we found Grey Teal, Australian Shoveler, Black Swan and Paradise Shelducks. Lake Grassmere was next on the agenda a huge area of working salt pans situated close to the sea. At the far end we found a few waders including Double-banded Plovers, Curlew and Sharp-tailed Sandpipers, Red-necked Stint and Pied Stilts. It was time to travel to Kaikoura on the coast our base for the next two nights. On the sea we observed thousands of feeding and resting Hutton's Shearwaters. We stopped at Ohau Point for nesting Spotted Shags and close views of New Zealand Fur Seals. Checked in at our motel followed by dinner and an evening excursion for Little Owl this duly showed for Chris and Brent.

December 8th: Kaikoura

Daily total 52 New trip birds 7 Running total 134

Weather: Early mist giving way to sunny conditions 24c

Today was spent birding in and around the seaside town of Kaikoura which is internationally famous for its easy access to cetaceans and seabirds. After breakfast we checked the peninsula recording the commoner species of coastal New Zealand. At nine o'clock we boarded a boat for a pelagic trip into the deep and cool waters of the Pacific Ocean. Inshore waters held many Hutton's Shearwaters, Pied and Little Pied Cormorants and White-fronted Terns. It was not long before we encountered some of the special birds we had come to observe. Near a fishing boat we quickly located Northern Royal, White-capped and Salvin's Albatrosses, Northern and Southern Giant Petrels, Cape, Westland and White-chinned Petrels. The skipper put out a mix of fish liver in a cage which attracted many birds with several albatrosses fighting over feeding rights to this rich mixture. We went a little further out and stopped again recording Southern Royal and Wandering Albatrosses, Flesh-footed Shearwater, Great-winged Petrel and similar birds to the last stop. On reaching the deepest waters birds appeared to be less so we headed back towards the coast recording a pod of Dusky Dolphins and a single Arctic Skua. Lunch at the centre a rather modern building full of merchandise to attract the many tourists who visit this fascinating place for wildlife. After lunch we visited several coastal areas recording the commoner passerines. On the beach a Pacific Reef Egret, Variable Oystercatcher, Ruddy Turnstone and passing Australasian Gannets. A return to the New Zealand Fur Seal colony was made before walking along the beach to another grass sloped area. We waited a little while for Cirl Bunting an uncommon introduction which eventually showed low in a bush.

NEW ZEALAND

December 9th: Kaikoura, St Anne's Lagoon, Lake Lyndon, Arthur's Pass, Otira, Hokitika Sewage Ponds, Okarito, Franz Josef

Daily total 52 New trip birds 5 Running total 139

Weather: Fine on the coast followed by heavy and persistent rain in the west 14c

Today was basically a travel day as we crossed from the drier east coast to the rain affected west coast. Our first birding stop was St Anne's Lagoon a series of lakes surrounded by farm land. We quickly located Cape Barren Geese a rare and localised introduction in New Zealand. Other species in the area included Grey Teal, Australasian Shoveler, New Zealand Scaup, Grey Gerygone and Common Redpoll. Our journey took us past several river systems with extensive gravel areas along the banks. The endemic Black-fronted Tern was seen in flight on several occasions. The road started to ascend passing through a habitat of pine forest, rocky slopes and rivers. Next stop was Lake Lyndon situated near the top of an alpine pass. On the shore line up to five Double-banded Plovers and Pied Stilt. A careful scan across the lake produced a pair of Great Crested Grebes of the race *australis* a potential split of the future. Mike had brief views of New Zealand Falcon which we searched for without success. As we travelled to Arthur's Pass the weather started to get worse as heavy rain started to fall – unfortunately this persisted for the rest of the day affecting our plans. Lunch purchased at Arthur's Pass and consumed by the overlook at Otira. The road conditions were poor as we went down towards the coastal town of Hokitika and stopped to scan over the sewage lagoons. On the pools here a few of the common ducks and Black Swans. We crossed the bridge and travelled to the small village of Okarito which overlooks a lagoon. Here we added Great Egret and two Great Cormorants. The settlement of Franz Josef is a short drive away our base for tonight. The rain continued well into the night let us hope it stops before we head south in the morning.

December 10th: Franz Josef, Monro Beach, Jackson Bay, Haast Pass, Wanaka

Daily total 49 New trip birds 2 Running total 141

Weather: Bright and sunny after early showers 23c

The heavy rain of yesterday started to recede after breakfast. Our first stop was the car park at Franz Josef Glacier with several Kea around the car park. In the surrounding forest we recorded calling Long-tailed Koel, New Zealand Bellbird, Tui, Grey Gerygone, Tomtit and brief views of Shining Bronze Cuckoo. Our journey took us towards Monro Beach. Luck was with us as a pair of New Zealand Falcons were seen flying alongside the van, thankfully the male landed in a dead tree to give us exceptional views. On arrival at Monro Beach we walked through pristine forest to the beach area. Birds in the forest included Tomtit, Tui, New Zealand Fantail and New Zealand Pigeon. From the beach we observed White-capped Albatross, Fluttering Shearwater, Spotted Shag, Arctic Skua and White-fronted Terns. Next on the agenda was Jackson Bay once the most remote settlement in New Zealand, not much going on here so we turned round. A short stop near marsh and forest produced Fernbird and a group of Pipipi. Our final birding stop was the border at Haast Pass between Otago and Westland. The path here leads through pristine beech forest. After searching for a while we located a pair of Rifleman feeding young.

December 11th: Wanaka, Queenstown, Te Anau, Homer Tunnel, Lake Gunn

Daily total 38 New trip birds 2 Running total 143

Weather: Sunny with occasional showers at higher altitudes 20c

Today we set off to the town of Te Anau via Queenstown a major tourist destination on South Island. Familiar birds of the New Zealand countryside were observed along the route including high numbers of South Island Oystercatchers. The journey up towards the Homer Tunnel passes through a rich habitat of southern beech forests intermingled with fast-flowing rivers and steep-sided mountain sides. On arriving at

NEW ZEALAND

the Homer Tunnel car park we were met by several inquisitive Keas sitting on car roofs and generally loafing around people. A short distance away a boulder field with shrubs and grass areas provided us with excellent views of the scarce and vulnerable South Island (Rock) Wren bobbing up and down on the rocks. We returned by the same route stopping at Lake Gunn another pristine area of forest dominated by ancient beech trees. By the car park New Zealand Robin literally by our feet, another inquisitive species. We started the walk through the forest recording up to four Rifleman, New Zealand Fantail, Grey Gerygone and at least two Yellowheads another attractive and endangered New Zealand endemic bird. The weather worsened as we headed back towards Te Anau making a stop in a field being scraped by a tractor unit. The main attraction here was Black-billed Gulls and Black-fronted Terns feeding on worms. In the background a Cirl Bunting sang but we could not locate this uncommon species. Returned to Te Anau after seeing two of the countries special and rare birds.

December 12th: Te Anau, Milford Sound

Daily total 41 New trip birds 1 Running total 144

Weather: Rather mixed with frequent rain showers and sunny periods 14c/18c

A later start today as we had breakfast out in the town followed by a return visit towards the Homer Tunnel. Similar birds to yesterday afternoon along the way with the local Keas investigating cars near the tunnel entrance point. On arrival at Milford Sound we observed Weka around the car park looking for scraps. The boat trip into Milford Sound passes by some spectacular and dramatic scenery. On the occasion we were blighted by poor weather conditions including low cloud and driving rain at times. Near the quay the group recorded Great and Little Pied Cormorants, South Island Oystercatcher and nesting Kelp Gulls. Further down the sound a Fiordland Crested Penguin showed briefly before disappearing behind a large boulder. This is a rare penguin endemic to New Zealand and generally disperses well out to sea after the breeding season. Other birds present included Red-billed Gull and White-fronted Terns. Lunch taken in a cafe and returning back to Te Anau. Two Keas by the tunnel, one was playing with a stone – an intelligent and inquisitive bird, great fun to watch and study. Beyond the tunnel Baz located a Blue Duck feeding in a fast-flowing sector of river, this being the southern race of the species. Back in town to refresh and repack, as we head further south tomorrow to Bluff and over to Stewart Island.

December 13th: Te Anau, Wakapatu Beach, Riverton, Bluff, Foveaux Strait, Stewart and Ulva Islands

Daily total 62 New trip birds 4 Running total 148

Weather: Rather mixed with southwest winds 18c

This morning we continued our journey within New Zealand by heading south towards the coastal town of Bluff. The countryside held the usual birds along our route. First stop was at Wakapatu Beach a rather cool place with a sandy beach and rocky islets offshore. South Island and Variable Oystercatchers, White-fronted Terns and Ruddy Turnstones present on the beach and offshore. Next stop was the overlook at Riverton an excellent area for summering waders. Bar-tailed Godwits were present in good numbers along with Grey Teal, Australian Shovelers and Royal Spoonbills. We skirted past Invercargill and headed towards the rather run down port of Bluff with its aluminium smelter. At the end of State Highway One we scanned the ocean recording thousands of Sooty Shearwaters and a single Pomarine Skua an uncommon visitor. The ferry crossing across the Foveaux Straits was rather rough with birding opportunities limited. Despite this we managed to observe White-capped Albatrosses, Common Diving Petrels and a single Mottled Petrel. Arrived on Stewart Island and checked in for two nights at the Bay Hotel. In the afternoon we took the short ferry crossing to Ulva an island reserve full of natural vegetation and endemic birds. At Ulva we walked around the trail system recording Red-fronted and Yellow-fronted Parakeets, Kaka, Saddleback, Rifleman, Yellowhead, Pipipi, Weka and New Zealand Robin of the Stewart Island race. At 2000 hours we set off to another area of

NEW ZEALAND

Stewart Island for a kiwi tour. This was a fantastic experience as we walked through the forest and onto a sandy beach. Once on the beach we were able to study and observe up to four South Island Brown Kiwi at close range a fitting end to a great day.

December 14th: Stewart Island

Daily total 42 New trip birds 5 Running total 153

Weather: Sunny periods with some rain showers 14c/18c

At 0800 we set sail from the harbour on a pelagic tour down the eastern coast of the island. Just outside the harbour we located a group of Fiordland Penguins sitting on the shore and swimming next to the boat. The morning session of birding involved visits to various offshore islands and coastal waters. Interesting species included Sooty Shearwater, Stewart Island Shag, White-capped Albatross and Brown Skua. On another island our first Yellow-eyed Penguins and an out of place Royal Spoonbill. Chumming sessions attracted large numbers of birds including Southern Royal, White-capped and Salvin's Albatrosses, Cape Petrel and Northern Giant Petrels. In a sheltered area we encountered a flock of White-fronted terns and our target bird an Antarctic Tern a scarce species in New Zealand. The afternoon session was equally productive with many sightings of albatross and petrels. Several Buller's Albatross and a single subadult Chatham Albatross (rare off the New Zealand coast) were quickly found among the common White-capped and Salvin's Albatrosses and a few Mottled Petrels, Cook's Petrel and a huge Wandering Albatross. On our return to port a steady stream of seabirds and on the beach in Oban an immature Leopard Seal. A day of excellent pelagic birding on the eastern coast of Stewart Island.

December 15th: Stewart Island, Foveaux Strait, Roaring Meg, Cromwell, Lindis Pass, Lake Poaka, Lake Benmore (Ohau Delta), Omarama

Daily total 61 New trip birds 2 Running total 155

Weather: Generally sunny with occasional showers 18c

After consuming breakfast we headed down to the port for the ferry crossing back across the Foveaux Strait to Bluff. Fortunately the seas were not as rough as two days earlier. The crossing produced Common Diving Petrels, Fairy Prions, Sooty Shearwaters and small numbers of White-capped Albatrosses. On arrival in Bluff we headed towards the southern city of Invercargill to fill up with fuel and purchase supplies. We retraced our journey until passing the turning to Wanaka. Brent then found a female New Zealand Falcon perched on a cliff top allowing us to get good views. Further down the road at Cromwell a stop at the dam provided us with Great Crested Grebe, New Zealand Scaup and Black-billed Gulls. Lindis Pass had another New Zealand Falcon in a dry arid area of tussocks and low grasses. Passed through Omarama and headed to Lake Poaka where after a little searching we located two Black Stilts a highly endangered and rare endemic confined mainly to the Mackenzie Basin. The whole region is dominated by canals, lakes and dry open country with a backlog of snow-capped mountains, a truly spectacular setting. On the canal good numbers of ducks and Great Crested Grebes. On arrival at Lake Benmore we walked into a marshy area bordered by willows and scrub. We waited for several minutes until a male Baillon's Crake came into view offering us excellent views.

December 16th: Omarama, Glentanner, Mount John, Cooper's Lagoon, Bromley Sewage Lagoons, Christchurch

Daily total 42 New trip birds 1 Running total 156

Weather: Sunny with light south winds 20c

Checked out of Omarama and made the short trip up to Glentanner which is situated under the mountain range including Mount Cook. On arrival we quickly located three Black Stilts, Double-banded Plovers and

NEW ZEALAND

Wrybills with young. Returned to the main highway and visited Mount John which is home to an astronomy department from the University of Christchurch. Brent went walkabout and located four Chukars feeding on a rocky slope. We picked up a packed lunch in the small town of Geraldine and made our way to Cooper's Lagoon on the coast. On the lagoons Mute and Black Swans, Pied Stilt and the commoner wildfowl. Our final birding stop was at Bromley on the outskirts of Churchill. The ponds here held hundreds of ducks including New Zealand Scaup, Australasian Shoveler and Grey Teal (many with ducklings). At 1700 hours we dropped the two Johns and Chris off at the airport for their respective flights. Tomorrow we head eastwards to the remote and rarely visited Chatham Islands for the final leg of our New Zealand tour.

December 17th/18th: Christchurch, Auckland, Napier, Chatham Islands

Daily total 30 New trip birds 4 Running total 160

Weather: Generally sunny and warm 20c

We left Christchurch on the 17th for Auckland and a flight onto the Chatham Islands. Unfortunately technical problems affected our flight plans to the Chatham Islands so we had to overnight in Auckland. On the 18th we finally departed for the islands with a stop at Napier en route. Arrived on time at Chatham airport. Kelp Gull, Black Swan, Welcome Swallow and Swamp Harrier were around the airport. Checked in at the Hotel Chatham our base for the next few nights. After a light lunch we headed south to the Tuku Reserve with the assistance of Liz and Bruce Tuanui two conservationists. Along the route many Eurasian Skylarks, European Starlings and House Sparrows. We stopped at a sector of forest recording Weka, Chatham Island Gerygone, Chatham Island Pigeon and good numbers of Common Redpolls. Next was a stop at a cliff face with views of Pitt Island Shag and White-fronted Terns. Our last stop on this sector was another stretch of forest specifically managed and protected for the rare Magenta Petrel, plenty of burrows but no sign of usage in the burrows, some being almost four metres in length. Liz then took us on another walk adjacent to a river and pristine forest habitats, on the road up to two Chatham Islands Pipits another endemic species. The walk through the forest added (Chatham Island) Tui a distinct form and possible split due to its larger size and different vocalisations. Other species present included the local race of New Zealand Fantail, Red-fronted Parakeet and Chatham Island Gerygone feeding young. Returned to base for a buffet dinner, this was followed by a short talk on the islands fauna and flora by two ladies from the Department of Conservation.

December 19th: Chatham Island, Mangere, Pyramid, South East Island, Star Keys, Round Island

Daily total New trip birds 3 Running total 163

Weather: Overcast with light northwest winds 17c

Today was set aside for a pelagic tour of the outer islands and rock stacks the last terra firma before the coast of Chile in South America. On the beach outside the hotel we recorded Kelp Gull, White-faced Herons and White-fronted Terns. Travelled down to the quay and boarded our boat for the day a very powerful machine suited to the seas around the islands. Welcome Swallows were nesting under the quay a recent colonist to the islands. Mangere was the first island to be visited a rather long island with patches of forest and dense scrub. Along the way we located Northern Royal, Buller's and White-capped Albatrosses, Cape Petrel, Common Diving Petrel, Sooty Shearwaters and White-faced Storm Petrels. The skipper anchored off Mangere so we could scan the island for birds. We had views of Tui and the extremely rare Chatham Islands Parakeet which numbers around 200 birds on two small islands. Next on the agenda was Pyramid the only known nesting grounds of the beautiful Chatham Island Albatross. They duly obliged as they landed next to the boat to take fish scraps. Other species present included Southern Royal Albatross among the numerous Buller's Albatrosses and Cape Petrels. We headed back towards the main islands with Pitt Island in the distance. South East Island was our destination an important area for birds with no landing allowed. A rounded islet next to it held good numbers of Northern Giant Petrels. Anchored up and consumed lunch

NEW ZEALAND

whilst watching the island. Luck was with us as the very rare and range-restricted Shore Plover showed well feeding by a kelp bed. We headed out towards the wind-battered Star Keys an important breeding ground for New Zealand Fur Seals with a Little Penguin en route. Not many birds here due to the waves so we headed to nearby Round Island. The grassy slopes here with adjacent cliffs attracted Pitt Island and Chatham Island Shags the latter in two small colonies numbering no more than 300 pairs.

December 20th: Blind Jim's Creek, Te Whanga, Pitt Island (Caravan Bush), Flowerpot, Evening pelagic off The Horns (SW Chatham Island)

Daily total 53 New trip birds 4 Running total 167

Weather: Overcast with frequent showers and a northwest wind 15c

Today started with a visit to several sites in Chatham Island. The usual species were seen in and around the country areas and Double-banded Plovers with young on the shore of the lagoon. Late morning we joined the boat again for a crossing to Pitt Island. From the boat we observed White-capped, Northern Royal and Buller's Albatrosses, White-chinned and Cape Petrels and White-faced Storm Petrels. Arrival on Pitt Island which has a population of only thirty-five people and one school. Bernie picked us up at the quay and drove up to Caravan Bush a remnant forest patch. Near the cabins we located the local race of Red-fronted Parakeet, Tomtit, New Zealand Fantail, Tui and Chatham Islands Gerygone feeding young. A short walk through the forest produced similar birds and we checked out the Chatham Petrel burrows that have been built. Returned to the quay recording Pacific Reef Egret a vagrant to the islands and a Chatham Oystercatcher feeding on a rock. Back to the main island for an early dinner and out again in early evening for another pelagic off The Horns which is situated off southwest Chatham Island. We passed a Chatham Islands Shag colony before arriving at The Horns where the sea had a gentle swell. As the light started to fade the breeding seabirds started to appear. We recorded Sooty and Short-tailed Shearwaters, Northern and Southern Giant Petrels, White-fronted Tern, Fairy and Broad-billed Prions, a single Cook's and Cape Petrels, Buller's Albatross and White-faced Storm Petrels. The journey back to base was affected by driving rain and an increasingly heavy sea. Good to be back on dry land after another excellent pelagic.

December 21st: Waitangi West, Te Whanga Lagoon, Red Bluffs

Daily total 27 New trip birds 0 Final total 167

Weather: Unsettled with rain showers 15c

The predicted bad weather from the south arrived before breakfast although it was in the main sunny. Our first birding stop was the remote settlement of Waitangi West. The beach here allowed us excellent views of the rare Chatham Oystercatcher (up to 4 birds), Chatham Island Pipit and flocks of Red-billed Gulls. Returned to base for lunch after rechecking Te Whanga Lagoon which had less birds than yesterday. In the afternoon a few of the group visited Red Bluffs but the weather curtailed birding to a degree.

December 22nd: Chatham Island, Christchurch, Auckland, Los Angeles, London

The long travel day back to Europe started with Air Chatham flight into Christchurch. From here a connection to Auckland and across the Pacific Ocean Los Angeles. A short delay here before crossing North America and the North Atlantic to London where the tour concluded.

The following mammals were seen in New Zealand.

European Brown Hare

Common Rabbit

NEW ZEALAND

Brown Rat – Stewart Island

Sperm Whale – 4 Kaikoura

Bottle-nosed Dolphin – a few noted in coastal waters

Dusky Dolphin – off Kaikoura

Common Dolphin – 100 Wellington Harbour

Hector's Dolphin – 4 in Queen Charlotte Sound, South Island

New Zealand Fur Seal – small numbers in the south, widespread Chatham Islands

Leopard Seal – immature in Oban Harbour, Stewart Island

Mark Finn Birdwatching Breaks December 2009