

New Zealand

Comprehensive II

23rd October to 8th November 2023 (17 days)

Chatham Islands Extension II 2023

8th November to 11th November 2023 (4 days)

Trip Report



New Zealand Rock Wren by Michael Walsh

Trip report compiled by Tour Leader: Erik Forsyth

Tour in Detail



Blue Duck by Michael Walsh

We started our tour at Puketutu Island where we added our first endemics, a pair of Paradise Shelduck with chicks. We also recorded Variable and South Island Oystercatchers, Royal Spoonbill, White-faced Heron, many Black Swans and distant Bar-tailed Godwits and Red Knot.

Despite there being no access to the Muriwai Gannet colony due to landslides we still managed to bird from the nearby carpark. Here we enjoyed good views of many breeding Australasian Gannets, a few White-fronted Terns and Silver Gulls as well as three Variable Oystercatchers on the beach. Before

we left Muriwai we stopped at a red-flowering African Coral tree which had two feeding Tui, a large, endemic honeyeater. We arrived at our hotel early in the evening and settled on for the night.

A night walk in Tawharanui Regional Park was very productive with a very good sighting of the endemic North Island Brown Kiwi down to 4m! We also enjoyed good looks a Morepork, a species of Boobook.

The following morning, we headed back to Tawharanui Regional Park stopping near the entrance to enjoy good looks at New Zealand Pigeon. In the park proper we soon found the stunning New Zealand Plover allowing close looks. We also enjoyed good views of White-fronted Terns and Silver Gulls.

Walking along a forested trail we soon found the endemic North Island Saddleback giving very close views as it called nearby. We also bumped into a group of Brown Teal on the stream and nearby we added several endemics such as the Whitehead, New Zealand Bellbird, North Island Robin, Tui, Grey Warbler as well as New Zealand Fantail. A visit to Pakiri Beach in the afternoon gave us our sought-after target in the rare Australasian Fairy Tern. Four birds were present and gave good looks flying in the nearby lagoon. Here we also recorded several New Zealand Plover and a lone Double banded Plover.

Despite the high wind the previous days in the Hauraki Gulf, we managed to get out and find reasonable conditions near Littke Barrier Island despite being a bit choppy! After setting the chum bag, we soon had loads of birds coming close to the boat. It didn't take long before one of our major targets was in the bag, so to speak. A New Zealand storm Petrel, spotted by Mike, flew several circuits around our boat for all to see giving great looks! After this success we could relax and enjoy the birding spectacle. Other notable species were Several Flesh-footed Shearwater, New Zealand White-capped and Salvin's Albatross, Buller's and Fluttering Shearwaters, many Fairy Prions and White-faced Storm Petrels, a lone Short-tailed Shearwater, many Common Diving petrels fluttering



Kaka by Michael Walsh

low across the sea and a lone Northern Giant Petrel. Of note, at one stage we had four New Zealand Storm Petrels in view.



South Island Takahe by Michael Walsh

Our day visit to Tiritiri Matangi Island was fantastic with good weather throughout the day. Not only did we see the targets that we were seeking such as the very rare and monotypic Stitchbird, the prehistoric looking South Island Takahe and the equally rare North Island Kokako. We enjoyed watching the pair of South Island Takahe after a frantic search near the lighthouse although we saw the female disappear to feed its chick in the nearby grass, we never did see the youngster. On the way back to the boat we concentrated on finding the North Island Kokako. After only a short while we heard a pair and managed to locate them not far away! With this success we could relax as we had hit our three main targets. We also recorded New Zealand Bellbird, Whiteheads, Brown Teal and New Zealand Pigeons. As if that wasn't enough, we also enjoyed great looks at a pair of New Zealand Fernbird and a Spotless Crake was seen quickly crossing

a trail and another briefly in the creekwhat a day!

A later start had us arriving at Miranda mid-morning. Our targets fell fairly easily and best of all were close scope views of the endemic and rare Wrybill allowing good photo opportunities. We also recorded big numbers of South Island Pied Oystercatchers, Bar-tailed Godwits and Pied Stilts. Our last stop of the day was a visit to the fast-flowing Tongaririo River where we found a nice close pair of Blue Duck feeding along the river edge in the early evening, a much sought after, rare and endangered species.

The following morning, we birded a track alongside Lake Taupo and concentrated on the large reedbed. It wasn't long before we heard the booming call of our main target the Australasian Bittern. After what seemed like an eternity Mike, spotted a bittern in the reedbed and we quickly got the bird in the scope offering great looks. Within a short while we spotted a rare sight of three bittern flying around the reedbed offering fabulous looks. Our next target, Spotless Crake, took a longer time to find. Initially heard it took loads of patience before a bird was spotted alongside the reedbed allowing fantastic looks. We also saw two New Zealand Fernbird while waiting for the crake to show.

After a pleasant boat trip over to Kapiti Island in sunny conditions we soon started birding in earnest. Soon we were watching Red-crowned Parakeets, Whiteheads, Tui, and New Zealand Bellbirds. A new bird for us was the entertaining and conspicuous Weka, a large rallid. a short while later one of our major targets fell, a pair of New Zealand Falcon showed brilliantly allowing good views as they hunted nearby and even landed in a tree to copulate! After dark we went looking for Little Spotted Kiwi. We heard several birds calling, but it took quite a while before a bird was found. By then only half our group



Wrybill by Michael Walsh



Yellowhead by Michael Walsh

photo opportunities off two New Zealand King and several stunning breeding plumaged Spotted Shags. The former a very rare bird with a total population of around 750 birds! Not long after this and we were enjoying fabulous looks at Dusky Dolphins. Before heading to Blumine Island we located another eight New Zealand King Shags.

We were very successful on Blumine Island where we had excellent looks at several of our targets including three of the endangered Orange-fronted (Malherb's) Parakeet, a vocal South Island Saddlebacks and a few Weka, a large flightless rail.

Heading South we stopped at Lake Eltewater where we added Hoary-headed Grebe (a recent coloniser to New Zealand and found breeding at this Lake), Australasian Shoveler, Grey Teal and the smart Great Crested Grebe.

Our next port of call was Kaikoura and we enjoyed had a brilliant pelagic trip. Four species of albatross were recorded including the huge Northern and several Wandering Albatross, smaller Salvin's, White-capped and the tiny Black-browed Albatross. Small numbers of Westland and Cape Petrels, Northern Giant Petrels and singletons of Buller's and Short-tailed Shearwaters. An unusual record was an Antarctic Fulmar which stayed away from the boat but seen well. We also had good numbers of the localized Hutton's Shearwaters continually passing the boat and so maybe 60 recorded in total. In the afternoon we continued to Arthur's Pass where conditions were perfect. Here we had fabulous looks at several confiding Kea, an endemic mountain parrot. A short walk from our rooms produced several endemic targets. We enjoyed good looks at a pair of Pipipi (Brown Creeper), a smart Tomtit, Lesser Redpolls and a fabulous pair of Riflemen showing down to a few meters.

The good weather followed us to Omarama and here we persevered and struck gold or should I say black gold. Walking out onto the Pukaki floodplain with clear views of Mt Cook was surreal. We did however come across plenty of Double banded plovers recently arrived on their breeding grounds. Excellent close looks were enjoyed and here we also had South Island Oystercatchers and Black-billed Gulls and Black-fronted

was still searching and on the second attempt we found a bird crossing a trail in the forest. Before we caught our ferry back to the mainland, we managed excellent flight looks at the migrant Long-tailed Cuckoo, a fitting end to our stay here.

Our ferry over to the South Island offered stunning scenic views and we did pick up New Zealand White-capped and Salvin's Albatross, Westland Petrels, Flesh-footed and Fluttering Shearwaters and Fairy Prions.

The following morning in beautiful sunshine we headed out into Queen Charlotte Sound. Soon we were seeing Little Blue Penguins and had excellent



North Island Brown Kiwi by Michael Walsh



Fiordland Penguin by Michael Walsh

Terns. It took a while to locate our main target and eventually we tracked down a Black Stilt....the most endangered wader species in the World with a mere population of 180. We located four sub-adults and had very good looks. A few Wrybill were also seen and believed to be breeding nearby. In the afternoon we managed to track down the endemic New Zealand Pipit amongst countless Eurasian Skylarks. We also enjoyed great looks at small flocks of Yellowhammer.

From here we headed to Te Anua and in particular the Fiordland National Park. Our target here, the New Zealand Rockwren, which lives in rocky terrain with scattered bushes. The following morning in mixed weather we headed to the Homer Tunnel, the only site to see our target. After gaining permission to walk near the tunnel and negotiating a minefield of rocks we spread out

over good habitat. After what felt like an eternity Marianne located our target and we quickly gathered all the troops and ascended on the trail a few hundred meters away. The pair were very obliging waiting around for all our spread-out group to arrive. We enjoyed excellent looks and went away happy. Afterwards we enjoyed several looks at the Kea, walked in beautiful moss and fern covered forests before heading to our hotel for the night.

Our crossing to Stewart Island was fairly quiet for birding although Common Diving petrels, White-capped Albatross and Sooty Shearwaters were noted.

Our afternoon visit to the predator free Ulva Island was enjoyable. First stopping to look amongst boulders and caves in Halfmoon Bay where we had a great look at a few Fiordland Crested Penguins. On the island we had several views of Red-crowned and Yellow-crowned Parakeets, Pipipi (Brown Creeper), Tui, New Zealand Bellbird, New Zealand Pigeon, fantail and gerygone. We also enjoyed fabulous looks at Yellowhead the rarest of the Mohua family. These citrine-coloured delights were seen close on several occasions. We had a terrific night walk on Stewart Island with two South Island Brown Kiwi seen at close range for walk away views and had a bonus pinky coloured aurora night sky.

Our pelagic off Stewart Island was a delight due to flat seas. We found several more Fiordland Penguins and nesting caves and on the sea. Many Little Penguins were also recorded. A pair of Brown Skua performed brilliantly, catching pieces of fish that our skipper threw to them, and then flying back to their favorite rocky outcrop. At Fenner Island we enjoyed a colony of Foveaux Shags and chumming just beyond there we had Southern Royal (a new tick for us), Wandering, Salvin's, White-capped Albatross, hundreds of Sooty Shearwaters, Cape, Westland, Northern Giant Petrels and a late, White-chinned Petrel was a new bird for us.

Our final birding destination for the tour was to visit The Northern Royal Albatross breeding ground at Taiaroa



Morepork by Michael Walsh

Head on the Otago Peninsular. Here we enjoyed fabulous looks at six of these majestic and huge birds whirling around the headland. Other species noted were Spotted Shag and Royal Spoonbill. Our last endemic for our tour, the Otago Shag, was seen well as a few birds flew past us on several occasions.

Well, we eventually arrived on the Chatham Islands after several cancelled flights due wild weather. En route to the hotel, scanning the beach close to the airport, we picked up a lone Chatham Oystercatcher, our first endemic. After this successful start we headed to our hotel for a welcome dinner and headed to bed after a long day.

The following morning, after a tasty breakfast, we drove to the Tuku Reserve where we quickly picked up another target, the Chatham Warbler, a pair showing very well. Other species included Tui, Red-crowned parakeet Swamp Harrier and several introduced European species. Our next target the Chatham Pigeon was much harder to find with several brief views of disappearing birds into the forest and even two birds seen along the roadside by our handyman from the hotel, when he came to replace our punctured Tyre! With that news we were keen to find those birds and after a frantic search could not find them. We then drove back and forth up and down the valley and eventually spotted a bird past and landed out of sight. We drove closer and located the bird feeding on a short grassy paddock near the road and much to our relief. From the vehicle we enjoyed fabulous looks.

The early afternoon was spent chasing Emu, an Australian introduction. After a few kilometres and several gates, Marianne spotted a female with a lone chick and then further up the road, a large male.

A sea watch from the North-east coast produced Buller's Albatross, Northern Giant Petrels and Sooty Shearwaters. Our destination gave us our last two endemics, Chatham, and Pitt Island Shags nesting on a rocky outcrop. With only a day we had found our five endemics and headed back to the hotel for a wonderful meal!

Annotated List of species recorded

For the species list and more photos, please see the eBird Trip Report:

Comprehensive II <https://ebird.org/tripreport/166445>

Chatham Islands II <https://ebird.org/tripreport/170378>

Rockjumper Birding Ltd
Labourdonnais Village
Mapou, Riviere du Rempart
31803, Mauritius

Tel: (USA & Canada) toll-free: 1-888-990-5552
Email: info@rockjumper.com
Website: www.rockjumperbirding.com