

New Zealand

TM Zhong

5th October to 21st October 2023 (17 days)

Trip Report



Whitehead by Adam Riley

Trip report compiled by Tour Leader: Erik Forsyth

Tour Summary

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 Australasian Gannets, a few White-fronted Terns and Silver Gulls as well as three Variable Oystercatchers on the beach. Driving around to another access point we saw another 14 Variable Oystercatchers and a huge Caspian Tern parked on the rocks. Before we left Muriwai we stopped at a red-flowering African Kaffer boom 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.



The impressive Tui by Erik Forsyth

The following morning, we headed to Tawharanui Regional Park stopping near the entrance to enjoy good looks at New Zealand Kaka. Up to eight birds were calling and flying allowing good looks as well as photo opportunities. 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 eight Brown Teal on the stream and in the forest we added endemic 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 although a wee bit distant across the lagoon.

A night walk back in Tawharanui Regional Park was very productive with three good sightings of the North Island Brown Kiwi with one bird as close as 3m! We also enjoyed good looks a Morepork, a species of Boobook.

Our day visit to Tiritiri Matangi Island was fantastic with good weather throughout the day. Not only did we see



Blue Duck with chick by Erik Forsyth

the targets that we were seeking such as Red-crowned Parakeet, the very rare and monotypic Stitchbird, prehistoric looking Takahe and the equally rare North Island Kokako. Only a single Takahe was seen but we had excellent looks at close range and at least 3 pairs of Kokako were enjoyed. We also recorded New Zealand Bellbird, Whiteheads, and New Zealand Pigeons. As if that wasn't enough, we also enjoyed great looks at a pair of the tiny Riflemen (completing our six families in New Zealand), a pair of Spotless Crake seen several times crossing a small creek and lastly a pair of New Zealand Fernbird.....what a day!

An early start had us arriving at Miranda mid-morning. Our targets fell fairly easily and best of all were two close Wrybill allowing good photo

opportunities. We also recorded big numbers of South Island Pied Oystercatchers, Bar-tailed Godwits and Pied Stilts. We then drove to Lake Taupo where we found good numbers of New Zealand Scaup at close range along the shoreline. It was here that we also found a small flock of Black-billed Gulls and could compare them with two Silver Gulls nearby. Our last stop of the day was a visit to the fast-flowing Tongaririo River where we found a nice male Blue Duck, a much sought after, rare and endangered species. A nearby reedbed at the south of the lake produced New Zealand Dabchick and Eurasian Coot.



South Island Saddleback by Adam Riley

The following morning, we birded a track alongside Lake Rotopounamu finding several goo birds including Tomtit, (the North Island form with white chest) three Yellow-crowned Parakeet that showed really well but very flighty and a few New Zealand Kaka flying overhead. We then travelled to Wellington where a night walk at Zealandia for kiwi was unsuccessful although we did hear up to five birds calling and see two of the highly endangered Takahē! We returned to Zealandia in the morning where we enjoyed great photo opportunities for New Zealand Kaka, Stitchbird, North Island Saddleback, Brown Teal and Dunnock was new for us.

Our ferry over to the South Island was uneventful but we did pick up White-capped Albatross, Westland and Cape Petrels and Fluttering Shearwaters.

The following morning in beautiful sunshine we headed out into Queen Charlotte Sound. It was a fabulous tour and soon we were seeing Little Blue Penguins and had excellent photo opportunities for a single New Zealand King and 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 the tiny Hector's Dolphin all around the boat for at least 30 minutes.... brilliant. this is a highly endangered cetacean with a tiny population. We also recorded good numbers of Dusky and a few Common Dolphins. Before heading to Blumine Island we located another 9 New Zealand King Shags.



The entertaining Kea by Erik Forsyth

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, several South Island Saddlebacks and the 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. Six species of albatross were recorded including the huge Northern and Southern Royals, Wandering, Salvin's, White-capped

and the tiny Buller's. Small numbers of Westland and Cape Petrels, Northern Giant Petrels and singletons of Buller's and Short-tailed Shearwaters. We also had good numbers of the localised Hutton's Shearwaters continually passing the boat and so maybe 800 recorded in total. From here we continued to Arthur's Pass where conditions had deteriorated with high winds, rain and sunshine thrown in! However, despite the conditions we had fabulous looks at several confiding Kea, an endemic mountain parrot.



The critically endangered Black Stilt by Erik Forsyth

The weather followed us to Omarama and despite continual rain we persevered and struck gold or should I say black gold. Walking out onto the muddy Pukaki floodplain the rain continued. We did however come across plenty of Wrybill and 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 Terns. It took a while to locate our main Target but eventually we tracked down a Black Stilt....the most endangered wader species in the World with a mere population of 180. 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, a citrine coloured bunting. Our search for the South Island Wren was unfortunately halted due to recent snowfalls in the Fiordland National Park. We did however enjoy a spectacular day with stunning views of the snow-blanketed mountains and the large Kea were always around to entertain us. With perseverance we did find the beautiful Yellowhead to complete the trio in this endemic family.

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

We had a terrific night walk on Stewart Island with five North Island Brown Kiwi seen including one just outside our accommodation. Here we also had excellent looks at a Morepork (sitting on the corner fence), a species of boobook owl.



Northern Royal Albatross by Erik Forsyth

A hastily planned water taxi around Halfmoon Bay to look for Fiordland Penguins was very successful seeing five birds in total including an adult with a large chick near the entrance of a cave.

Our pelagic off Stewart Island was a challenge due to high winds and rough seas. We found several more Fiordland Penguins and a pair of Brown Skua on their favorite rocky outcrop. At Fenner Island we enjoyed a colony of Foveaux Shags and chumming just beyond there we had Southern Royal, Wandering, Salvin's, White-capped and the small and stunning Buller/s albatross, Sooty Shearwaters, a single Broad-billed and

several Fairy Prions, Cape, Westland and Northern Giant Petrels. Our thanks go to skipper Nate for keeping the boat in the best possible positions and taking us out in the first place.

Our final birding destination for the tour was to visit The Northern Royal Albatross breeding ground at Taiaroa Head on the Otago Peninsular. Here we enjoyed fabulous looks at five 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.

Annotated List of species recorded

For the species list and more photos, please see the eBird Trip Report: <https://ebird.org/tripreport/156528>

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