

New Zealand

Comprehensive II 2022

24th October to 9th November 2022 (17 days)

Trip Report



The Endangered Blue Duck

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Tour Summary



Whitehead

The tour quickly kicked off with our first stop at a coastal lagoon close to our hotel where we were watching our first endemics including the impressive Wrybill, about eight birds in all, a few South Island Oystercatchers and several smart Paradise Shelduck. Other birds of note included 300 hundred Bar-tailed Godwits and 100 Red Knot freshly arrived from epic non-stop Alaska flight.

Other notable birds included Pied Stilts, White-faced Heron, about 100 Black Swan, and Australasian Shoveler. Our next port of call was Muriwai Gannet colony where we were enthralled by 100's of Australasian Gannets attending their nests. Equally impressive were the beautiful and elegant White-fronted Terns. Our last stop or the day was Pakiri Beach where the highlights included fabulous close views of the highly endangered Fairy Tern, of which less than 20 pairs nest in New Zealand. We also

saw many confiding New Zealand Dotterel and alone Double-banded Plover.

A pelagic trip into the Hauraki Gulf also gave us some spectacular seabirds including Fluttering, Buller's and Flesh-footed Shearwaters, Cook's Petrel, Fairy Prion and close looks at both White-faced and the rare New Zealand Storm Petrels. Our last port of call in the Auckland area was to the predator-free island of Tiritiri Matangi where our targets quickly fell, such as the beautiful and rare Stitchbird, a pair of the equally rare North Island Kokako that appeared out of nowhere and after a few minutes bounded off and a lone South Island Takahe which we watched for 5 minutes before it disappeared into the forest!

Today was a travel day and a short stop around Lake Taupo gave us endemics in the form of New Zealand Scaup, New Zealand Grebe and the shy New Zealand Fernbird while a walk along the fast-flowing Tongariro River in the evening gave us brilliant looks at three of the very rare Blue Duck.

Within five minutes of arriving at our next stay, Kapiti Island, we had bagged another lifer endemic in the form of the ever present and confiding Weka, a large rail. Our night walk failed to produce any sightings of Little spotted kiwi mainly due to a strong wind which made conditions difficult. Next morning, we enjoyed great close-up looks at New Zealand Kaka, a large forest parrot as well as a New Zealand Falcon gliding above, Brown Teal and North Island Saddleback.

Our ferry trip over to the South Island was fairly productive and gave us views of White-capped Albatross, Westland Petrel, Fairy Prion and a lone Sooty Shearwater.



New Zealand Kaka



Cook's Petrel

We had a fantastic day out in Queen Charlotte Sound with excellent close looks at New Zealand King and Spotted Shags, the former as they are a very rare bird and only seen here and the latter particularly popular as they were in breeding plumage. On Blumine Island we had crippling looks at the critically endangered Malherb's (Orange-fronted) Parakeets and Tomtit.

Our pelagic out of Kaikoura was perfect with sunny skies and small swell. We managed to find most of our target birds including the huge Wandering Albatross, sitting on the water within 2m from us as well as fly-byes close to the boat! At least four Black-browed, 15 Salvin's and 3 White-capped Albatross were also noted and the supporting cast included Westland, Cape and Northern Giant Petrels as well as good numbers of the localised and rare Hutton's Shearwater.

Later in the day we arrived at the mountainous and forested Arthur's Pass where we quickly found our targets where we enjoyed excellent looks at Kea, a huge parrot that lives in the high mountains. We also enjoyed close looks at Pipipi (Brown Creeper) which belongs to the endemic Mohua family. We were very happy here as we enjoyed eye-level looks at two pairs of the cute Rifleman including a pair at the nest hole on a mossy bank.

Our day in the Mackenzie country was made difficult for birding to say the least with very strong, gusty winds reaching 80km and with heavy flooding from rain previous days. Our main target the rare Black Stilt was nowhere to be found but the day was saved with fabulous looks at good numbers of the endemic Black-fronted Tern and a few smart Black-billed Gulls. We also enjoyed close looks at Great crested Grebes with adorable youngsters riding on their backs.

Our last adventure took us down to Stewart Island and after a quick check in we caught a water taxi to Ulva Island. Here we found all our targets quickly including the rare Yellowhead, watched feeding at close range in small family groups while small flocks of Red-crowned Parakeets were constantly in view. Careful checking of these parakeets led us to a few excellent sightings of the scarcer, Yellow-crowned Parakeet. We also encountered several South Island Saddlebacks, their calls giving them away as well as many confiding South Island Robins.

We also had a pelagic outing, first stopping near Oban to study two young Fiordland Penguins and their cave entrance. The day before, on the water taxi, we had enjoyed good looks at an adult here bouncing over the rocks. Our skipper stopped at another island where we had close



Fiordland Penguin

looks at a pair of hungry Brown Skua. Further out in the ocean we stopped and chummed, and this brought in several much sought after species such as the huge Southern Royal, many Salvin's and White-capped and a smart Buller's Albatross. Other species noted included hundreds of Sooty Shearwater, a few Westland, Cape and one White-chinned petrel. Five Fiordland Penguins and eight Little Penguins were also seen. We ended the day with good looks at two of the critically endangered, Yellow-eyed Penguin and a colony of Foveaux Shag.

We ended the tour on a high note at the Northern Royal Albatross colony at Taiaroa Head on the Otago peninsular where we enjoyed great looks at several birds flying gracefully around the headland. Also noted were Otago Shag and Royal Spoonbill.

Annotated List of species recorded

For the species list and more photos, please see the eBird Trip Report: <https://ebird.org/newzealand/tripreport/80779>

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