

# New Zealand

Comprehensive I 2023

*9<sup>th</sup> January to 25<sup>th</sup> January 2023 (17 days)*

## Trip Report



Salvin's Albatross by Polly Neldner

**Trip report compiled by Tour Leader: Erik Forsyth**

## Tour Summary



New Zealand Pigeon by Polly Neldner

With Cyclone Hale approaching New Zealand and wild weather expected to reach us on day two of the tour we headed out on a mission to see as many birds as possible before the weather deteriorated. First off, we visited Puketutu Island near our hotel. On the outgoing tide we found a nice selection of birds including the endemic Wrybill, South Island Oystercatcher, Double-banded Plover and migrant Bar-tailed Godwit and Red Knot. A bonus was a vagrant Broad-billed Sandpiper, a rare visitor to New Zealand. Our next stop was the busy seabird colony at Muriwai. Here we enjoyed close looks at several hundred Australasian Gannets feeding and shielding their chicks from the sun, White-fronted Terns, and smart Silver

Gulls. A stop at Pakiri Beach failed to find the endangered Fairy Tern but we did come up trumps with the endemic New Zealand Plover and Variable Oystercatchers.

Our time in Omarama was well spent with fabulous looks at an adult and juvenile Black Stilt, an endangered species, and the rarest wading bird in the World with a population under 200! We also had regular looks at Black-billed Gulls, Black-fronted Terns, Great Crested Grebe, and New Zealand Scaup.

A couple of visits to the forested Tawharanui Regional Park gave us many good sightings including the endemic Brown Teal living along the stream and freshwater estuaries, noisy flocks of Whiteheads, strikingly plumaged North Island Saddleback, New Zealand Kaka- a large vocal parrot. We heard Morepork, a species of Boobook Owl, calling in the evening but we only had two brief fly byes. Interestingly Cook's Petrels were heard calling after dark at our hotel each night. We suspect that they probably have nesting burrows on the forested hillsides on the nearby beach.



Wrybill by Polly Neldner



We had a productive return visit to Pakiri Beach finding the endangered Fairy Tern, a very rare subspecies of which there now only 12 pairs in New Zealand! Scanning out to sea we noticed a fishing boat not too far out and was surrounded by up to 40 Flesh-footed Shearwaters and two brief Buller's Shearwater. A visit to a nearby wetland gave us very close looks at a confiding New Zealand Fernbird creeping through the vegetation and popping up on an open perch occasionally.



Pipipi by Paul Neldner

Our visit to Miranda shorebird centre was great fun and very productive. Just along the coast we had hundreds of South Island Oystercatchers and 5 very close Wrybill, you could see the bill bending to the right! Interestingly out in the bay we saw several Australasian Gannets diving and there were many Buller's and Flesh-footed Shearwaters flying low and landing on the water nearby. Two Parasitic Jaeger were also seen well. Back at the Miranda hides we enjoyed several thousand Bar-tailed Godwits, a few Red Knot, hundreds of Wrybills and 65 Pacific Golden Plovers at close range.

An early start found us by the fast-flowing Tongariro River where we enjoyed great looks at the Blue Duck, another rare endemic. Soon afterwards we visited a large reedbed and wharf where we recorded several much sought after species such as Australasian Bittern, seen in flight across the reedbed, a Spotless Crake crossing the road twice between vegetation, Black-billed Gull, New Zealand Grebe, and New Zealand Scaup. Later in the afternoon we caught our ferry over to Kapiti Island where we were greeted by Weka, a large rallid and common on the island. We also saw several Red-crowned parakeets, Tui, Bellbird, New Zealand Pigeon and excellent looks at the scarce New Zealand Falcon. A night walk produced the much-wanted Little Spotted Kiwi, albeit brief, and then long looks at a Little Penguin heading to its nesting burrow.



Black Stilt by Polly Neldner





**Red-crowned Parakeet by Polly Neldner**

Our crossing from the North to the South Island on our large ferry produced several new birds despite the flat sea conditions and no winds. Good views were obtained of many Fairy Prions and singles of Buller's Shearwater, Northern Giant Petrel and 5 White-capped Albatross.

We had a fabulous time in the Marlborough Sound on our four-hour cruise and best of all were very close looks at a group of the endangered Hector's Dolphins swimming right alongside the boat. New birds included 49 of the rare New Zealand King Shag and several smart Spotted Shags. We also had many Fluttering Shearwaters, two Parasitic Jaeger, and loads of Australasian Gannets. We also stopped off at Blumine Island where we had very close looks at four of the endangered Malherb's (Orange-fronted) Parakeets. A supporting cast was a family group of Tomtit.

We woke to a foggy morning at Kaikoura where visibility was limited and headed out to try and locate a fishing vessel. Small groups of the localised Hutton's Shearwaters were seen whizzing past and after a while we located a small Fishing vessel. Here we enjoyed fabulous close looks at small numbers of the huge Southern and Northern Royal Albatross, where we could compare plumage differences. These beasts towered in size compared to the smaller White-capped and Salvin's Albatross. Other good birds included Westland, Northern Giant and Cape Petrels, Flesh-footed Shearwater, and many smaller Fairy Prions. In the afternoon we arrived in the Beach forested Arthur's Pass. Soon we located the tiny and tail-less Rifleman, a family group of three feeding close by. We enjoyed great views of this highly sought-after endemic. It wasn't long before we had located our first Kea, a large mountain parrot. We enjoyed prolonged views of several birds flying and landing around the village.

The following morning, we had an excellent birding walk around the village and nearby forest seeing South Island Robin, Tomtit, a family group of Pipipi (Brown Creeper) several more Kea, two groups of Rifleman seen at close quarters and best of all were the three Long-tailed Cuckoos (Koel), chasing each other and calling right around us, fantastic!

Our time in the Omarama area was well spent with excellent looks at the critically endangered Black Stilt with a population under 200 individuals! We had prolonged and close views of an adult and juvenile. Here we also saw many Black-billed Gulls, a few Black-fronted Terns which breed along the rocky riverbeds and Great Crested Grebes were new for us.



**New Zealand King Shag by Paul Neldner**



Kea by Paul Neldner

Our crossing to Stewart Island was very exciting due to big swells. We saw hundreds of Sooty Shearwaters on the crossing as well as a few White-capped Albatross, Common Diving petrels and a single Fairy Prion. On Stewart Island an incoming fishing boat attracted several albatrosses to land near the Wharf. Here we enjoyed point-blank looks at two stunning Buller's Albatross and a few NZ White-capped Albatross. Our visit to Ulva Island was very productive with excellent looks at our three targets: South Island Saddleback, Yellow-crowned parakeet and the very rare Yellowhead, the latter a member of the Mohua family. We also enjoyed great looks at Red-crowned parakeet, South Island Robin and Pipipi (Brown Creeper).

Our pelagic off Stewart Island was simply fabulous starting off with two groups of Little Penguins. A chumming session at Wreck Reef gave us several new birds including several White-faced storm petrels, a lone Grey-backed storm petrel which came in in for close fly byes, a juvenile Black-browed albatross, a single Cook's Petrel, two Mottled petrels showed fairly well typically flying past at 50 yards and the grey on the breast could be seen! We also had many White-capped, A few Salvin's and nine magnificent Southern Royal Albatross at close range, man Sooty Shearwaters and Fairy Prion. Just before we headed back a Buller's albatross landed next to the boat. A fine day with five albatross species seen!

Our last destination was the Royal Albatross centre at Taiaroa Head. Here we enjoyed the fabulous views from the lookout platform. Our main target the Otago Shag eventually put in several appearances along with Spotted Shag and Royal Spoonbill. Just before we had to leave a pair of majestic Northern Royal Albatross flew over the viewpoint allowing fabulous close looks, a fitting end to a wonderful trip.

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## Annotated List of species recorded

For the species list and more photos, please see the eBird Trip Report [here](#)

Press ctrl and click on the link to view.

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