

A Spring trip to New Zealand, Oct 21st to Dec 15th 2008

This report is divided into three sections:

Introduction and notes

Locations and Itinerary

Birds

INTRODUCTION AND NOTES

In 2008 we (my husband Peter and myself) spent about 8 weeks in New Zealand – roughly 15 days in North Island, 20 days in South Island, 4 days on Stewart Island and an 11 day cruise to the Sub-Antarctic Islands. This balance seemed about right for a leisurely bird-watching trip with some sight-seeing thrown in and gave us enough flexibility to cope with changes in plan and inclement weather.

In North and South Islands we hired a camper van. This was an ideal way to travel as it allowed us to stay very close to, or actually in, the locations where the birds were. We made extensive use of DOC (Department of Conservation) sites, alternating those with commercial sites (which were excellent) when we needed to have showers, do laundry or charge the cameras. We hired a fairly basic, but completely adequate, 2 berth model with fridge and microwave for a very reasonable rate from Kiwi Campers. We picked the van up in Auckland and returned it in Christchurch, driving a total of 6300kms.

The Sub-Antarctic Islands cruise was organised by Heritage Expeditions, a New Zealand company, and although it was expensive it was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to visit Auckland, Campbell, Macquarie and Snares Islands with the chance to see 7 species of penguin, 12 species of Albatross (some on the nest) and about 20 other species of “tubenoses”. There were opportunities to get very close to nesting albatrosses on Campbell Island, and also to see the astonishing mega-herb flora, while Enderby Island (in the Auckland Islands) provided close encounters with a Giant Petrel chick, NZ Pipits, Sub-Antarctic Snipe, Flightless Teal and Sea Lions. Most participants voted the day spent on the beach at Sandy Bay on Macquarie Island surrounded by thousands of (completely unafraid) King and Royal Penguins, plus Elephant Seals, Skuas and Giant Petrels, to be the best wildlife experience of their lives. (Note that Macquarie Island is Australian territory so this cruise attracts Australian birdwatchers anxious to increase their Australian lists!) The time spent at sea was never dull with first class bird guides to help out with that distant petrel and plenty of interesting lectures.

We went on 6 boat trips/pelagics during the mainland part of the trip – Hauraki Gulf, Kaikoura, Monarch (Otago Peninsula), French Pass, Milford Sound and Akaroa Harbour. All of them were well worthwhile and most gave views of birds not seen anywhere else e.g.:

Hauraki Gulf Pelagic: Buller's Shearwater, NZ Storm Petrel, White Faced Storm Petrel, Black Petrel

Kaikoura Pelagic: Hutton's Shearwater, Westland Petrel (also Dusky Dolphin and Sperm Whale)

French Pass Sea Safaris: King Shag

Akaroa Harbour: White Flipped Blue Penguin (and Hector's Dolphin)

We also went on 2 organised Kiwi trips – Ian Cooper at Okarito and Phillip Smith on Stewart Island.

Resources

ID Books - We used “The Field Guide to the Birds of New Zealand” by Heather and Robinson which is adequate but out of date – there is no entry for NZ Storm Petrel and it uses the old “13 species” system for the albatrosses. We also had “Seabirds” by Brian Parkinson – the

text is useful but the photos are useless! On the cruise we used "Guide to Antarctic Wildlife" by Hadoram Shirihai which is excellent and has up-to-date treatment of the albatrosses.

Sound – we had "Birds of New Zealand" by John Kendrick but it has a very odd selection of species, and misses out critical ones like Fernbird and Long Tailed Cuckoo.

Planning – we used "Where to watch birds in New Zealand" by Kathy Ombler. We also used many trip reports from <http://www.birdtours.co.uk/> and <http://www.travellingbirder.com/> – ones by Newman, Wallace and especially Greg Baker were particularly helpful. The itineraries and trip reports from Birdquest and other tour companies were also useful. We also monitored Birding-NZ for about a year before the trip.

An essential part of the planning, and indeed of the trip itself, was an AA Road Atlas (3km to 1 cm) which we bought from Amazon. We highlighted on the Atlas all the places which we might want to go to, which made route-finding and decision making very easy.

In order to help plan the itinerary we drew up two tables – "Birds and where to find them" and "Locations and birds you can find there". We then used this information during the trip to modify the itinerary as required.

Some notes

Albatrosses – Much controversy and splitting has been going on – 13 albatross species or 22?. We stuck to the 19 in the list agreed by ACAP - see http://www.acap.aq/en/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=41&Itemid=46. Unfortunately Heather and Robinson does not treat them this way.

Sandflies – do not underestimate the level of nuisance caused by these creatures in the central and south west parts of South Island. Just when you want to sit outside with a drink and watch the sun go down whilst cooking your BBQ, they descend in hordes. You can stop them biting with repellent but they still hover all round your face - very unpleasant. Note that local repellents such as Ultra Guard work better than pure DEET preparations – DEET stops them biting but it does not repel them.

Weather – it can be very cold in New Zealand in October, even in the north of North Island. It can also be very wet! We had very cold and often wet weather in North Island which caused us to cancel our planned visit to Whakapapa and the Tongariro area but we were lucky in South Island with a great deal of fine and sunny (but cool) weather. You need to plan in flexibility as the weather is completely unpredictable.

Fish and Chips - New Zealanders think a lot of their fish and chips. Rightly so, as far as the fish is concerned. But the chips are pretty awful – always frozen and/or reconstituted potato.

Cake – we had some dreadful cakes in New Zealand! Heavy, damp, doughy etc. Even the waffles, crumpets, pikelets etc were soggy and heavy. Beware!

Wine – all the wine we had during the trip was very good. But it was not cheap. Brands that we recognised from the UK were about the same price as in the UK. Villa Maria was always consistent and often on offer. We did sometimes see very cheap wine on special offer but we didn't try it!

Eating out - most meals we had in cafes and restaurants were good. Particularly good were: Hislops Café, Kaikoura; Redcliffe, Te Anau; Wairau River Winery, Renwick; Morris and James ceramics, near Matakana.

Tiritiri Matangi - we stayed on the island for 2 nights, which was enough time to find Kiwi, Blue Penguins and Kokako and to have plenty of time for photography. We left the camper van in the car park by the ferry at Gulf Harbour and were told it would be safe there.

Driving rules – easy for Brits as it is left hand drive but one thing is curious – if you are on a main road and are turning right., a driver coming towards you gives way and lets you turn right.

LOCATIONS AND ITINERARY

Included in this part of the report are comments about locations which we felt might be of use to others. I will try not to repeat information easily available elsewhere.

Working roughly from north to south:

North Island

Waipu Cove – we walked to the sandspit from the campsite – be warned – it is quite a long way! The shallow inlet behind the spit was full of birds. We were lucky to find a Fairy Tern there and there were also plenty of NZ Dotterels on the end of the spit.

Helena Bay/Teal Bay (Mimiwhangata Coastal Park) – we found about 15 birds easily viewable from the bridge, 2.5 kms from the turning signposted Teal Bay, though it was such a dull day and they are such unobtrusive birds that we did not notice them at first. Twice while we were looking, a local came past in a car and asked if we knew how rare the birds were that we were looking at – they are obviously quite proud of them! It is difficult to see how any ducklings survive with the density of Swamp Harriers in that part of the world.

Lake Waro - Hikurangi, 10 km north of Whangarei. Turn off Highway 1 at the more northerly of the two turnings to Hikurangi and turn almost immediately left to the lake and picnic area (past a rubbish tip!). There were two pairs of Dabchick and breeding Scaup here.

Trounson Kauri Forest- fascinating information boards detailing the vast numbers of stoats, cats, possums, rats etc which have been caught here. Also a very interesting boardwalk. However, many of the taller Kauri trees in this general area seem very unhealthy and nobody seemed sure why this was. Note that the **Kauri Museum** in Matakoho was well worth a visit.

Tawharanui – a fenced “island” – very interesting to see what is being done to re-create habitat and encourage regeneration.

Miranda – vital to be aware of the tide times and to be there on the hours either side of a high tide – we were surprised how many birding visitors were not aware of this. It was not the great spectacle we had expected (the bird numbers were not large compared with, say, the Dee Estuary in the UK) but we wouldn't have missed it (it was the only place we saw Wrybill). We were surprised to see huge numbers of Black Billed Gulls there – they apparently try to nest on the shingle banks, usually unsuccessfully.

Pureora Forest – we enjoyed Pureora Forest, not least because we were the only visitors there and you can camp right next to the forest. It was one of the two places we saw Yellow Crowned Parakeet; we also saw Rifleman, Long-tailed Cuckoo, NZ Robin, Whitehead, Tomtit and Kaka.

Mapara Forest – the circular trail has recently been cleared, so access was not a problem. However the birds were disappointing – no sign at all of Kokako. We parked our campervan by the Mapara entrance as there are no campsites for many miles - we asked a local who said it would be OK.

Ruatiti Domain - Ruatiti Domain (see Ombler for directions) is a large public access area where you can camp (free!). The camping area is situated in a large loop of the river so there is good access to much suitable Blue Duck territory and camping means you there at the right time of day – the ducks are semi-crepuscular.

Kaimanara Forest Park – we were unable to find the Forest Walk described in our brochures, also the camp sites were in a poor state and were being renovated. We walked along some tracks but did not see very much.

Lake Rotopounamu – recent posters to Birding-NZ have waxed lyrical about the number of birds in this location since the recent predator control operation. However, we saw little when we were there – apart from traps! - maybe because it was very windy and cold.

South Island

French Pass – a small village on the end of a long promontory. There are patches of forest but it is mostly sheep farming. The attractions are the tame Wekas and the boat trip run by French Pass Sea Safaris <http://www.seasafaris.co.nz/> which can show you nesting King Shags. Note that the road to French Pass has long exposed stretches with nothing but a thousand feet of steep short grass between you and the sea!

Kaikoura - the pelagic was just a good as expected, with birds around the boat – such as Cape Petrels – which are just not viewable from the shore. Also fur seals are viewable on the beach.

Note that the **Fyffe-Palmer Reserve** 9 kms from town was one of the few places we had good views of Brown Creeper.

The Alpine-Pacific Holiday Park has great facilities and fantastic views of the mountains.

Klondyke Corner (near Arthur's Pass) – we camped here and were plagued by Keas and Sandflies. We explored the braided rivers but only saw Black Fronted Terns..

Upper Otira Valley (near Arthur's Pass) – supposedly a site for Rock Wrens but none were seen. Stunning scenery though – we had fine clear weather – though the Keas were a nuisance at the car park.

Mt Cook / Lake Pukaki – worth visiting for the scenery alone – nothing prepares you for the colour of the lake. But we saw 15 Black Stilts here near Glentanner so it was altogether a good day!

Okarito – is a delightful laid-back little place - you can see the mountains when it's clear and watch Kiwis at night. See Ombler for further details. The Pakihi Walk on the Okarito road has Long Tailed Cuckoos, Robins and Fernbirds.

Hollyford Camp – This is a delightful quirky and characterful place on the Hollyford Road quite near the Homer Tunnel. Blue Ducks are sometimes seen in the Hollyford River. There was a glow-worm site just down the road – the camp owner will give you directions – and Kakas nest across the road.

Catlins River Walk – Ombler page 217, but the road names seem to have changed. The road to the campground is now Morris Saddle Road. The northern end of the Catlins River Walk is along Chloris Pass Road (not Wisp Road). The track seems to have been diverted – there are no longer 4 bridges and we hit good Yellowhead territory on the hill across the far side of the first bridge only 20 minutes from the (very neglected and muddy) picnic area.

Curio Bay – this large campsite in the Catlins, which at first sight looks a little scruffy, has a beautiful sandy beach from which you can sometimes see Dusky Dolphins and also a beach with a petrified forest on which you can see Yellow Eyed Penguins in the late afternoon. If you do not need power you can find a very secluded site.

Stewart Island – we stayed in Pilgrim Cottage which is owned by Phillip and Di Smith who run the Kiwi tours. It was very quaint, was a reasonable price and in a central but secluded position with very tame Kakas.

Ulva Island - we booked a ferry for 7:00 am and had the island to ourselves for an hour or so. We returned at 2:00 pm which was just right to cover all the trails very slowly, though you could easily stay all day.

Itinerary

Date	Activity	Overnight
Oct 23 rd	Arrive Auckland and collect camper van, drive north to Waipu Cove	Waipu Cove
Oct 24 th	Explore Waipu Cove – drive to Paihia via Lake Waro and Brown Teal site (Helena Bay / Teal Bay)	Paihia
Oct 25 th	Waitangi Treaty Grounds, then to Wairere Boulders and to Trounson Forest area	Trounson
Oct 26 th	Trounson Kauri Forest then via Dargaville to the Kauri Museum. Then to Sandspit.	Sandspit
Oct 27 th	Hauraki Gulf Pelagic	Sandspit
Oct 28 th	Tawharanui RP then to Orewa	Orewa
Oct 29 th	To Tiritiri Matangi	Tiritiri Matangi
Oct 30 th	On Tiritiri Matangi	Tiritiri Matangi
Oct 31 st	Tiritiri Matangi then return to Orewa	Orewa
Nov 1 st	Through Auckland to the Pacific Highway, Waharau Regional Park, Kawakawa Beach, to Miranda	Miranda
Nov 2 nd	Miranda in am. Drive to Rotorua	Near Rotorua
Nov 3 rd	Rotorua – shore walkway – then Kiwi Tour at Rainbow Springs, then to Pureora and the Totara Trail.	Pureora
Nov 4 th	Pureora – Buried Forest then Forest Tower – Mt Pureora track – drive to Mapara. Walk the Mapara track	Mapara
Nov 5 th	Mapara track again. To Tokaanu Wharf (Lake Taupo), Lake Rotopounamu circuit, Frethey Drive for fernbirds.	Motuoapa, Lake Taupo
Nov 6 th	Frethey Drive again, then Kaimanawa Forest then to Ruatiti Domain	Ruatiti Domain
Nov 7 th	Drive to Wellington for the ferry to Picton. Then to Canvastown	Canvastown
Nov 8 th	Drive to French Pass. “Sea Safari” pelagic in pm for King Shags.	French Pass
Nov 9 th	Marlborough wine area. Then to Lake Grassmere and Kaikoura	Kaikoura
Nov 10 th	Albatross Encounter Pelagic. Ffyfe-Palmer forest loop in pm.	Kaikoura
Nov 11 th	To St Annes Lagoon (Mata Kopae Lagoon) then to Lake Pearson, Klondyke Corner, Arthur’s Pass village	Klondyke Corner
Nov 12 th	Otira Valley walk, Bridal Veil walk, then to the West coast	Hari Hari
Nov 13 th	Franz Josef Glacier, Fox Glacier, Lake Murchison, then to Okarito. Kiwi Tour.	Okarito
Nov 14 th	Pakihai Walk, Monroe Beach in pm then to Haast	15km south of Haast
Nov 15 th	Walk around whitebait sanctuary, then to Neil’s Beach, Jackson Bay, Haast Pass (Bridle Track and Lookout Track)	Cameron Flat
Nov 16 th	Bridle track again. Then to Wanaka then inland to the River Ahuri Conservation area / Ben Avon Wetlands.	Omarama
Nov 17 th	Mt Cook area – Lake Pukaki, Glentanner, Kea Point	Twizel
Nov 18 th	Black Stilt tour. Then to Queenstown and on to Glenorchy, Lake Sylvan and Lake Sylvan trail	Lake Sylvan
Nov 19 th	Routeburn Track then drove to Te Anau	Te Anau
Nov 20 th	Homer Tunnel early am, then Marian Lake trail (from the Hollyford Rd), then to Milford Sound and 3:45 pm cruise.	Hollyford Camp
Nov 21 st	Lake Gunn, Te Anau, then through Gore and Clinton and the back road towards Owaka, to the Tawanui campground.	Tawanui
Nov 22 nd	North end of the Catlins River Trail then to Curio Bay campsite	Curio Bay
Nov 23 rd	Tautuku Estuary Boardwalk, Purakaunui Falls, Surat Bay, Nugget Point	Kaka Beach
Nov 24 th	Drive to the Otago Peninsula. Monarch Cruise. Tiairoa Head viewpoint. Drove to Oamuru.	Oamuru

Nov 25 th	Drive north to the Peel Forest then on to Akaroa	Akaroa
Nov 26 th	Akaroa Harbour cruise. Then did touristy things, cleaned van and packed.	Akaroa
Nov 27 th	Drive to Christchurch and returned van. Flew to Dunedin	Dunedin
Nov 28 th	Start of cruise.	At sea
Nov 29 th	At sea	At sea
Nov 30 th	Auckland Islands, ashore on Enderby Island	Auckland Is
Dec 1 st	Auckland Islands, ashore on main island/zodiac trip	Auckland Is
Dec 2 nd	At sea	At sea
Dec 3 rd	Ashore at Macquarie Island, Sandy Bay	Macquarie Is
Dec 4 th	Ashore at Macquarie, at the main landing	Macquarie Is
Dec 5 th	At sea	At sea
Dec 6 th	Ashore at Campbell Island	Campbell Is
Dec 7 th	At sea	At sea
Dec 8 th	Zodiac trip at the Snares	At sea
Dec 9 th	Arrive Bluff. End of cruise. Ferry to Stewart Island. Halfmoon Bay walk. Kiwi trip in evening.	Oban
Dec 10 th	Ryan's Creek Trail, Fuschia track	Oban
Dec 11 th	Ulva Island	Oban
Dec 12 th	Various tracks and walks. Underwater boat trip.	Oban
Dec 13 th	Ferry to Bluff, coach to Invercargill, Southland Museum, fly to Auckland.	Auckland
Dec 14 th	"Round the Bay" trip, ferry to Devonport, walk to North Head.	Auckland
Dec 15 th	Fly home.	

BIRDS

This list includes all notable birds but generally excludes non-native species.

References to the Sub-Antarctic Cruise are in italics.

North Island Brown Kiwi – we did not see this bird – our only chance was the night walk at Trounson Kauri Park but this was cancelled due to the very wet and cold weather

Okarito Brown Kiwi – seen on the organised trip with Ian Cooper but not well, although they were calling loudly

South Island Brown Kiwi - no real attempt was made to see this

Stewart Island Kiwi / Tokeoka – one bird seen very well feeding in seaweed on the beach on Philip Smith's guided trip. Also one seen well from the path on Ulva Island in full daylight – about 11:00am - near West End Beach

Little Spotted Kiwi – a courting pair seen very close, from the Wattle Track boardwalk on Tiritiri Matangi just after dark. They were located by following the calls.

Great Spotted Kiwi – apparently these can be heard easily from Arthur's Pass village but we were camped down the road at Klondyke Corner and did not hear anything.

King Penguin - *Macquarie Island (approx 8000)*

Gentoo Penguin - *Macquarie Island*

Yellow Eyed Penguin – seen very well at Curio Bay on the Catlins coast. Our campsite was above the beach where they come ashore so we could watch with a glass of wine in our hands! Unfortunately there were a lot of people on the beach, and there are no warnings to clear the beach before, say, 4:00 pm when the penguins think of coming ashore. As we saw them so well here we did not try the other well known spots on the East Coast.

(Subsequently seen exceptionally well on Enderby Island)

Little Blue Penguin – seen from several boat trips (Hauraki Gulf, Milford Sound, Monarch Cruise), on land on Tiritiri Matangi and Oban (coming ashore at dusk) and at the Oamaru Penguin viewing. This latter event was much better than I expected – it was fascinating to watch the birds trying to get ashore in the heavy surf and we also had very good views of fledgling penguins begging food from the returning adults. Then when leaving, there were penguins in the car park and on the road!

White Flipped Penguin (which may or may not be a separate species) Seen from the boat trip around Akaroa harbour in Cathedral Cave.

Fiordland Crested Penguin – three birds were seen at Monroe Beach walking out of the water (at the far northern end of the beach) in mid afternoon. We did NOT see them from the boat trip on Milford Sound although the captain was looking for them and expected to see them

Snares Crested Penguin – *Snares Island, from the zodiac*

Rockhopper Penguin - *Macquarie Island*

Royal Penguin - *Macquarie Island*

Great Crested Grebe – Pearson Lake near Arthur's Pass.

New Zealand Dabchick - We saw this bird easily at a number of locations:
Lake Waro – see Location notes. There were two pairs here
Lake Rerewhakaaitu, 20km south east of Rotorua, from the campsite on the western side.
Lake Taupo at Tokaanu, near Turangi, from the boat ramp

We did NOT see them at Lake Rotopounamu, but it was very windy.

Wandering Albatross – *frequent at sea on the cruise*

Antipodean Albatross / Gibson's Albatross – *on the Kaikoura pelagic then occasionally at sea on the cruise*

Southern Royal Albatross – *seen well almost every day on the cruise, on Enderby Island and from 15 feet on the nest on Campbell Island*

Northern Royal Albatross – on the nest at the Tairaroa Headland, one flying on the Monarch boat trip and also on the Kaikoura pelagic.

White Capped Albatross – the Kaikoura Pelagic, the Monarch boat trip *and then frequent in the early part of the cruise; seen on the nest at SW Cape on the main Auckland Island.*

Salvin's Albatross – several seen well on the Kaikoura Pelagic and on the Monarch boat trip *and at sea on the cruise*

Chatham Island Albatross – *one bird seen on the cruise*

Black Browed Albatross – the Kaikoura pelagic *and at sea on the cruise.*

Campbell Albatross – *seen at sea on the cruise and also near the Snares and Campbell Island. The large nesting colony on Campbell could be seen in the distance.*

Buller's Albatross – *only one bird seen – an early returning nester on a ledge on the Snares.*

Grey Headed Albatross – *a few seen off Macquarie Island*

Light Mantled Sooty Albatross – *most days at sea and on the nest on Enderby Island and Campbell Island*

Flesh Footed Shearwater - Hauraki Gulf pelagic

Buller's Shearwater - large numbers seen on the Hauraki Gulf pelagic

Sooty Shearwater – small numbers seen on most pelagics and on the cruise but often quite far away

Short Tailed Shearwater – *one or two seen on the cruise*

Hutton's Shearwater - the Kaikoura pelagic

Fluttering Shearwater - the Hauraki Gulf pelagic, Cook Strait crossing *and on the cruise*

Common Diving Petrel - the Hauraki Gulf pelagic, the Foveaux Strait crossing *and on the cruise*

Westland Petrel - the Kaikoura pelagic

Black Petrel - the Hauraki Gulf pelagic

White Chinned Petrel – the Kaikoura Pelagic and *a few seen most days on the cruise*

Southern Fulmar – *several occasions on the cruise, though this is not usual*

Cape Pigeon – common around the boat on the Kaikoura pelagic *and on the cruise*

Blue Petrel – *a small number of birds seen briefly on the cruise*

Northern Giant Petrel – on the Cook Strait crossing, the Monarch boat trip, the Kaikoura pelagic *and common on the cruise*

Southern Giant Petrel – *seen on the cruise when in more southerly waters especially around and on Macquarie Island where several white morph birds were seen*

Fairy Prion - the Hauraki Gulf pelagic *and on the cruise in more northerly waters*

Broad Billed Prion – *a small number seen on the cruise*

Antarctic Prion – *the common prion in more southerly waters on the cruise*

White Headed Petrel – *seen on the cruise especially around the Auckland Islands*

Mottled Petrel - *seen on the cruise, even then not easy to see as it is not attracted to boats*

Black Winged Petrel- the Hauraki Gulf pelagic, though we didn't realise this until we got home and looked at the photos!

Cook's Petrel - the Hauraki Gulf pelagic. *A few seen on the cruise.*

Pycroft's Petrel probably seen on the Hauraki Gulf pelagic but too difficult to call confidently. (Cook's Petrel are very variable and can look much the same as Pycroft's apparently)

White Faced Storm Petrel – the Hauraki Gulf pelagic

New Zealand Storm Petrel - the Hauraki Gulf pelagic (but only just, right at the last possible attempt)

Grey Backed Storm Petrel – *a few seen at sea on the cruise*

Black Bellied Storm Petrel - *at sea on the cruise*

Wilson's Storm Petrel – *a few at sea on the cruise*

Spotted Shag seen well from the boat trip at French Pass, at Taiaroa Heads (birds on nests can be seen from the viewpoint near the car park), and huge numbers (thousands) flying past on their way to roost while waiting at the Oamaru penguin viewing.

King Shag – 15 birds including 3 on nests seen from the boat trip from French Pass

Stewart Island Shag – seen at Taiaroa Heads from the Monarch Cruise, odd birds seen elsewhere especially on Stewart Island.

Auckland Island Shag – *on the Auckland Islands*

Macquarie Island Shag – *on Macquarie Island*

Campbell Island Shag - *on Campbell Island*

White Heron (aka Great White Egret) - we did not search for this but saw one on the lagoon at Okarito

Australasian Bittern – we heard one bird very well calling from an inaccessible swamp close to the campsite at Motuoapa on the E shore of Lake Taupo

Royal Spoonbill – curious to see these birds nesting in trees growing out of sheer cliffs over the sea at Taiaroa Head.

Cape Barren Goose – we saw a pair of birds at Mata Kopae Lagoon RR just north of Cheviot. They were quite flighty and not tame, but we felt unhappy about ticking them. As I understand it they are a self sustaining introduced population so are technically OK.

Paradise Shelduck – a very attractive and common bird, often with small ducklings

Blue Duck – we concentrated efforts along the Manganui-Ateao River between Raetihi and the Ruatiti Domain. (Turn off SH4 4km north of Raetihi west onto Ohura Road and follow the signs to Ruatiti.) At the main bridge over the river just before the road becomes a dirt track leading to Ruatiti we saw a roosting adult with 1 duckling. We then went on to Ruatiti Domain where we camped. At 4:00 in the afternoon we had superb long views of a pair feeding in the rapids, and subsequently saw two more birds.

Grey Duck (aka Pacific Black Duck) – mentioned here because it was notable how few well marked pure-bred individuals we saw. Most had significant amounts of Mallard in them.

Brown Teal – at Helena Bay (Teal Bay) we had views of about 15 birds on the small river, viewed from the bridge. We also saw birds on Tiritiri Matangi, on the pool down behind the bunkhouse (accessed from the far side) and on a pool in the north of the island. We never did see them on the small pool near the wharf.

Auckland Island Teal - *at Enderby Island both on the western end of the beach and on a pool on the far side of the island*

New Zealand Scaup – seen on many large lakes e.g. Rotorua and Taupo and smaller lakes such as Lake Sylvan. Also breeding, with ducklings at Lake Waro

Australasian Harrier – a very common bird, particularly so in the northern part of North Island.

New Zealand Falcon – despite being in New Zealand for 6 weeks and keeping a lookout the whole time, we only had two sightings of this bird – a very brief view near Mapara Forest in NI, and a more prolonged view of a bird hunting through the village at Okarito.

California Quail – this charming introduced quail is mentioned particularly because it has a habit of calling loudly from high up in a large bush or tree, and you can spend a long time searching for the source of the sound which sounds like it will be something much more interesting!

Weka – tame birds in the French Pass area, heard calling at Canvastown, and easy to see on Ulva.

Spotless Crane – excellent views of a pair on a pond in the north of the island at Tiritiri Matangi

Pukeko – a common birds of wet pastures and happy in the open. (Unlike the Purple Swamphen in Europe and even Australia, which is a skulking bird of reedbeds)

Takahe – seen on Tiritiri Matangi but note that they are no longer always reliably seen near the bunkhouse.

Subantarctic Snipe – *seen well by virtually all our party but not by us on Enderby Island!*

South Island Pied Oystercatcher – seen on beaches everywhere and on inland rivers on South Island. There was an albino bird at Kawakawa in NI.

Variable Oystercatcher – seen in ones and twos on many beaches. Most were completely black, except at Waipu Cove.

Black Stilt – Two birds seen at the Ben Avon Wetlands on the Ahuriri River. At Glentanner (near Mt Cook) a large group of 15 birds, consisting mostly of juveniles with a few adults, were seen in wet grassland, from the road, about 2km beyond the lodge and airfield. (There were none present in the area accessible through the gate just north of the airfield.) One was also seen feeding with Pied Stilts and Black Fronted Terns in a flooded field beside the main road south of Twizel.

New Zealand Dotterel – this bird proved surprisingly easy to see – several fearless pairs at the end of the spit at Waipu Cove, on the beach at Kawakawa and elsewhere. *The Auckland Islands subspecies was seen on Enderby Island.*

Banded Dotterel – it was a long time before we saw our first Banded Dotterel. None at Waipu Cove or any other beaches we looked at in North Island. We saw our first distant bird at Lake Grassmere, then failed to find any on the beaches at Okarito. The situation was saved by the large numbers of breeding pairs on the marshes at Glentanner, and at other similar “Black Stilt” sites. Not as easy as we expected – possibly they were keeping a low profile with small young nearby.

Wrybill - only seen at Miranda and then only because we decided to keep waiting well after high tide, on the advice of a local birdwatcher. Eventually the flock flew in on to the shingle and we had stunning views. But at this time in the spring you are really reliant on finding a non-breeding flock. All attempts to find them in their breeding areas failed.

Red Billed Gull – common

Black Billed Gull – seen at Miranda, Rotorua (though not many), Lake Grassmere and at braided river locations in South Island.

White Fronted Tern – common on the coast.

Antarctic Tern - *seen near land and on the nest at Snares, Campbell and Auckland.*

Black Fronted Tern – not difficult to see around braided rivers – particularly Black Stilt country and around Arthur's Pass.

Fairy Tern – we saw one bird well on the shallow inlet behind the spit at Waipu Cove – it just appeared, though we had searched for several hours beforehand without seeing any.

Kereru (New Zealand Pigeon) – single birds seen in many locations, often at campsites etc and not in the forest. Flocks of up to 50 birds were feeding on gorse in the Catlins and tended to fly suicidally out in front of the car.

Kaka – best sightings were at Pureora in NI and on Stewart Island, in Oban and on the Fuchsia Track. Also seen near Hollyford Camp in Fiordland and one at Tawharanui.

Kea – seen in Arthur's Pass village, at the Klondyke Corner campsite south of Arthur's Pass (where they tried to dismantle our camper van), at the lay-bys north of Arthur's Pass village, at Franz Josef Glacier (where we watched one at close quarters pulling a root out of the soil, apparently just for fun, as he rolled over on his back and squawked victoriously when he eventually got it!!) and at the Homer Tunnel.

Red Crowned Parakeet – on Tiritiri Matangi, Ulva Island *and very common on Enderby Island.*

Yellow Crowned Parakeet – Pureora Forest and Lake Sylvan trail

Long Tailed Cuckoo – we almost definitely missed this bird at Pureora because we did not know the call (we put it down to a Kaka at the time). Once learned, we heard it in several locations, but only had one poor view at the Pakihi Walk car park on the road to Okarito.

Shining Cuckoo – we heard this bird everywhere but found it very difficult to get a decent view.

Morepork – there were good numbers of Moreporks calling in the Pakihi Walk near Okarito when we did our "Kiwi Walk". They were heard in a number of other places but never seen.

Rifleman – if you can hear the sharp high call it helps a lot! You will hear them everywhere, though not necessarily see them if they are high in the trees. Luckily they are often feeding busily much lower down. Seen in virtually all decent forests, becoming much more common as we travelled south, and were particularly common and confiding on the Bridle Walk at Haast Pass.

Rock Wren – seen well at the well known Homer Tunnel site, at about 9:00 am.

NZ Pipit – surprisingly difficult to see well. Very good views at Glentanner. *Very common and confiding on Enderby and Campbell Islands.*

Grey Warbler – common, though difficult to see well. The delightful song could be heard everywhere.

NZ Fantail – a bird of forest edges and scrub – very common at the lake edge in Rotorua. We did not see ANY of the black form, though admittedly we did not look at every fantail we heard.

Fernbird – seen well at Frethey Drive in the early morning – we didn't try and call them up, we just waited until we heard the call or saw a bird flying. Contrary to what the books say, we picked up a lot of flying birds – at Frethey Drive they seemed to be to be nest-building which necessitated flying to the nest with bits of twig. At Tautuku Estuary Boardwalk in the Catlins we had a good view of a bird preening. We did not see them at Okarito village or at the marsh near the car park at Pakihi Forest although these are usually reliable sites.

Tomtit – seen in a number of scattered locations, often on the fringe of the forest or in a more open area of forest. They would often come very close to look at you, just once, then keep out of camera distance after that. Once we learnt the song, we realised we were hearing them quite often, singing from way up high, in places where we never actually saw them.

Tomtits were tame and common on Enderby Island (Auckland Islands). We also saw an all-black Snares tomtit from a Zodiac.

NZ Robin – many of the Robins we saw were ringed and had probably been re-introduced. Best views were at Pureora, Taiwharanui and Tiritiri Matangi on NI and on Ulva Island.

Silvereeye – not as common as we expected and surprisingly colourful. Worth learning the call and song so that you can discount it!

Whitehead - we only really had good views of these birds on Tiritiri Matangi, probably because the trees there are quite short. We also saw them elsewhere but not good views.

Yellowhead – we completely failed to find Yellowheads on the Bridle track at Haast Pass despite spending two long sessions there in good weather. I think they must have just been at a phase during the nesting cycle when they wanted to keep a low profile. We also did NOT see them on Ulva, in common with many others this year. However we DID see them well at the Lake Sylvan trail, then on the first km of the Routeburn track and at the north end of the Catlins River trail only 20 minutes from the car park. The song and call is very distinctive once you have heard it.

Brown Creeper – this bird really gave us the run-around. We were not expecting to find it difficult but in the end only had two really good sightings – at the Fyffe-Palmer Reserve near Kaikoura and several good views on Ulva Island.

Stitchbird – only seen on Tiritiri Matangi near the feeders.

Bellbird – not uncommon. Our first Bellbird was at Taiwharanui where they have recently re-colonised. They were very common on Tiritiri Matangi where they produce an extraordinary dawn chorus. One bird in the camp site at Akaroa sang for hours each morning.

Tui – our first Tui was at the camp site at Waipu Cove where it was singing on top of a pine tree. We got very excited! But we still got excited by Tuys even at the end of the trip – they are very charismatic birds. Though I think there are too many of them on Tiritiri Matangi. The red foreheads of many of the birds caught us out at first, until we saw them burying their heads in flax flowers.

Kokako – We spent three days on Tiritiri Matangi and only had two rather poor views, in both cases of two birds obscured by foliage, on the Wattle Track (once at dawn, once early afternoon). (At the same time another visitor had excellent views of birds crossing the Ridge Track!) We only heard a very short song once despite listening each morning. I was desperate to hear the song so we tried listening for a reliable bird called “Sunrise” at Pureora – no luck. We also tried Mapara at dusk and dawn – no luck. Maybe we were early in the season for singing? We did, however, see a distant bird at Trounson Kauri park which was unexpected.

Saddleback – seen well on Tiritiri Matangi and on Ulva Island.

Redpoll – mentioned here because they were exceptionally common both in beech woods and in more open moorland habitats – maybe they had bred well the previous year as it had been a good mast year. Their buzzing calls could be heard everywhere.