

Tour report summary

21 January to 10 February 2013

21-day tour with Wrybill Birding Tours, NZ

Led by Phil Hammond, Wrybill Birding Tours, NZ

Participants

Andrew & Beverley Robertson [USA], Lenny Fenimore [USA], Peter & Hilary Smith {UK}, Rod Nuttall [UK], Fred & Evelyn Dobson [CANADA].

Introduction

Our tour with 9 people from 4 countries in a 12-seater van went N, E, S, & W on the 2 main islands as well as Stewart Island. Some smaller islands, and out onto the ocean. We birded estuaries, swamps, slow rivers, fast snow-fed torrents, alpine areas, ancient forests, including a tower [optional], lakes, ponds, mudflats, and coastline.

HIGHLIGHTS

ESTUARIES & COASTAL FLATS. [several visited]

NZ Dotterel, Banded Dotterel, Wrybill, Variable Oystercatcher, NZ Pied Oystercatcher, and the very rare NZ Fairy Tern and Shore Plover. Migrants & vagrants included Greater Sand Plover, Sharp-tailed Sandpiper, Curlew Sandpiper, Red-necked Stint, White-winged Black Tern, and many others. In swamplier areas both NI and SI Fernbirds were seen well

HAURAKI GULF PELAGIC.

NZ Storm-petrel, Cooks, Parkinson's [black], and Pycroft's Petrels, Grey Ternlets and a good array of other seabirds.

TIRITIRI MATANGI.

On a pond on a remote part of the island that we had to ourselves, we sat quietly and watched a family of Takahe, a family of Spotless Crakes, and 2 Brown Teal plus visiting NI Saddlebacks, and Red-crowned Parakeets. Elsewhere on the island we saw Stitchbird, NI Robin, NI Rifleman, Whitehead, Bellbird, and

Kokako. Following a tip-off to Phil we also got great views of a couple of Moreporks in daylight. At night we all heard, and some saw Little Spotted Kiwi [2].

PONDS.

We stopped at several ponds for an array of ducks [including 3 vagrant Plumed Whistling Ducks], geese, swans, and cormorants, and 3 species of Grebe [Australasian Little, Great Crested, and NZ Dabchick].

NORTH ISLAND FORESTS.

We visited 4 ancient North Island forests with 1000 year old trees;--NZ Falcon, Long-tailed Cuckoo, NI Tomtit, Yellow-crowned Parakeet, NI Kaka, and many others all seen well. NI Brown Kiwi heard

TORRENT RIVER.

Very close, long views of the rare Blue Duck.

MARLBOROUGH SOUNDS.

3 rare and endangered birds seen really well in one morning—SI Saddleback, Orange-fronted Parakeet and King Shag on a remote island, plus SI Tomtit, Weka, and other great birds, including an Arctic Skua [Parasitic Jaeger] sitting on the water very close for the photographers. Plus the rare Hector's Dolphin and calf right beside the boat on the way back.

KAIKOURA PELAGIC.

20 seabird species seen including 5 species of Albatross [Northern and Southern Royal, NZ Wandering, Salvin's and White-capped], White-chinned, Northern Giant, Cape, and the rare Westland Petrels, Hutton's Shearwater and more.

SOUTH ISLAND FORESTS AND ALPINE AREAS.

In lower forests Brown Creeper, SI Rifleman, SI Robin, SI Kaka and other great birds already mentioned. In high Southern Beech forest in an alpine pass well away from human habitation a pair of Kea very close. And after a drive through stunning scenery to a point above the tree line we saw a male and female Rock [South Island] Wren in a spectacular alpine setting.

STEWART ISLAND.

All of the group got long, close views of 3 different Stewart Island Tokoeka [a sub-species of South Island Brown Kiwi] feeding on Sandhoppers on a remote beach reached by boat and a short bush-walk. On the way to the island and on a pelagic we had seen more albatrosses including great close views of the beautiful Buller's, both phases of Stewart Island Shag, a close encounter with a Brown Skua and more great bush birds.

YELLOW-EYED PENGUIN.

After the ferry from Stewart Island, and a drive through and walk in the beautiful Catlins forest we reached a North Otago beach where we waited for and saw rare Yellow-eyed Penguins swim ashore and waddle up a beach.

McKENZIE HIGH COUNTRY.

More great scenery including views across a blue lake to the Southern Alps and snow capped Mt Cook on the way to a very remote spot for a wild Black Stilt [not in captivity] . There are only 70 of these birds in the world and only a few of them in the wild and we were getting good views and photographs of one.

SUMMARY.

We had been on boats or ferries 8 times and had driven over 5000 kilometres [3000 miles] over the 21 days through some of the worlds most beautiful, and varied scenery sometimes spectacular. A multi-national group had been friendly throughout the trip and had enjoyed discussions such as what the bird of the day had been over dinner each night and had enjoyed some great food.

We had not "list built" with common introductions but had seen 64 endemic NZ bird species including some of the worlds rarest and 82 other species.

Some of the rare birds had been in well documented places, others had been found as the result of information from Brent or Sav or from Phil's friends or contacts.

All of the group had seen at least one species of kiwi, and ALL of the group had seen ALL of the other endemic species seen on the trip.