

# Tour report

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2-22 November 2024

**21-day tour with Hawaii Bird Tours & Wrybill Birding Tours, NZ**



The group with a South Island mountain backdrop. Mathieu Poot.

**Led by Matt Jones, Sav Saville, and Mathieu Poot, Wrybill Birding Tours, NZ**

## **Participants**

Mandy Talpas, Garrett Lau, Ron Pozzi, Pat Cummings, Jenny Comstock, Marsha Lee, John Chappell

## **Images**

Ron Pozzi, Pat Cummings, Mathieu Poot

## 2 November 2024 – Day One

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After packing the van and playing our first round of luggage Tetris, we left our Central Auckland Hotel and headed North to a local patch of Kauri Forest. Here we found our first endemics such as NZ Pigeon, Paradise Shelduck, Kaka, Grey Warbler and NZ Fantail. We had great views of a confiding Shining Cuckoo and groups of Pukeko chasing each other around nearby. We also added several interesting exotic species to the list, including Pheasant, Eastern Rosella and Sulphur-crested Cockatoo.

We moved on to our first bakery to pick up lunch, then headed to our first poo ponds (Sewage Ponds). We found more great endemics, adding NZ Scaup, NZ Dabchick and Brown Teal to the list as well as Pied Stilts, Grey Teal and Australasian Shoveler.

A nearby beach provided the perfect spot for lunch with views of endemic NZ Dotterels, and Red-billed Gulls and Variable Oystercatchers. Lunch was our first taste of New Zealand's unofficial National Dish, the meat pie!



New Zealand Dotterel. Ron Pozzi

We headed to our next spot, a coastal forest reserve containing small lakes and wetlands. As we started our walk we heard and then saw a Whitehead calling from nearby bushes. Carrying on around the coast we saw California Quail, Caspian Tern and more NZ Dotterel. A track took us through some beautiful native bush,

following a small creek. We had great views of North Island Saddleback, close up Kaka, Brown Teal with ducklings, NZ Pigeon, Bellbird and Tui.

After finishing the walk, we drove out past a sign saying ‘Watch out for Takahe’, before spotting some large funny looking Pukeko up ahead – Takahe! We spent some time watching two of these amazing Rails before heading off to look for their smaller relative – the Spotless Crake. Some of our group had brief views of this shy and elusive bird before it was time to head off. As we were leaving the reserve we had distant views of several Banded Rail with chicks as well as a Little Pied Cormorant.



South Island Takahe. Ron Pozzi

## 3 November 2024 – Day Two

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With everyone up and excited for our first Pelagic of the trip, we headed down to a local Marina. We saw a Banded Rail, as well as several NZ Dotterel and White-faced Heron before it was time to jump aboard our boat.

Heading out to sea, we had a bright sunny day with variable 20 knot winds, both of which stayed around the whole day. Luckily, we were running with the wind and the conditions were not too bad – for now! As we steamed further out, we started seeing Fluttering Shearwater, Flesh-footed Shearwater, Australasian Gannet and a few Buller’s Shearwater. We reached our chumming location, and the birds didn’t take long

to start showing up. Soon we had a group of Flesh-footed Shearwater, Black Petrel and White-faced Storm-petrel at the back of the boat, with passing Fairy Prion, White-faced Storm Petrel and Cook's Petrel. Next up, to much excitement, our first NZ Storm-petrel arrived. In total we had eight or more birds come through with at least five seen around the boat at once. A few hours into chumming, a beautiful Buller's Albatross few in and landed behind the boat – our first Albatross for the trip!



Buller's Albatross and NZ Storm Petrel. Mathieu Poot.

The trip back was into the swell and a lot rougher. A huge distant feeding flock of Shearwaters clouded the sky, with diving Australasian Gannets and Short-beaked Common Dolphins feeding below. Back into the harbour and the tide was out, with the mudflats exposed. We saw Bar-tailed Godwit, as well as Royal Spoonbill, White-faced Heron and Pied Stilt.

We headed out for a delicious dinner then off for a well-deserved sleep.

## 4 November 2024 – Day Three

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We awoke to a beautiful sunny day, had breakfast, fuelled up and headed North. Almost immediately we hit a major traffic jam, so we backtracked and headed East, seeing our first Feral Turkeys along the way.

We stopped at a beach and went for a walk, looking for the critically endangered Fairy Tern. We inspected the shells along the beach and saw Brown Quail, NZ Pipit and several Bar-tailed Godwit. At the end of the beach several of the group had distant views of a flying Fairy tern.

On to the next spot, we visited an estuary and sat down at a picnic table to eat lunch. Red-billed Gulls provided plenty of entertainment while we waited for the tide to drop and mudflats to be exposed. Before long, a pair of distant Fairy Tern was spotted, and then a second, and good long-distance views were had of the birds feeding over shallow water. As the tide continued to drop, Bar-tailed Godwit arrived on the newly exposed mudflats and a vagrant Little Egret was spotted in the distance.

We moved on to another estuary, and had our first views of Ruddy Turnstone, as well as seeing more Oystercatchers, NZ Dotterel, and Cormorants. Shortly after, a group of five Fairy Terns was spotted nearby, offering great views. We caught a few mud crabs and invertebrates before continuing on our way.

Much to everyone's surprise, the next stop was a Storm-water Pond in the middle of an Urban Housing development. Here we quickly found our main target – Australasian Little Grebe, and spent some time watching a pair on their nest with chicks. NZ Dabchick, a Brown Teal and other waterfowl were also present.

Continuing North, we saw a group of Greylag Geese next to the road before checking in to our motel. We had a delicious dinner next to the oldest fruit tree in the country, before heading out in search of our first Kiwi of the trip. Arriving at the location, we started our walk and within minutes had found an adult female Northern Brown Kiwi that showed incredibly well. We spent some time watching this incredible looking bird before continuing. Another three Kiwi were seen and a further ten heard, as well as Moreporks and a Fernbird. A baby Kiwi on the drive out and a possum for Mat to chase ended a very busy but fulfilling day.

## 5 November 2024 – Day Four

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An early start had us leaving our motel at 0700 and heading South for our next pelagic adventure! The day was very cold (especially for the Winterless North!) with beautiful clear skies and no wind, not ideal for the birds.

Arriving at the marina, we loaded into the boat and headed off, adding our first South Island Pied Oystercatcher to the list after seeing a flock roosting on the lawn of a beachfront mansion. Further out, we cut a lap around a small island, seeing four Reef Heron, followed by a male NZ Fur Seal at the mouth of the Harbour.

With the wind remaining very low, the birds were few and far between and mostly sitting on the water. The Common Diving-petrel were putting on a good show however, with thousands of these birds seen all through the day. Just before arriving at the chumming location, we came upon two new albatrosses for the trip, Salvin's and White-capped. They were young birds, distinguished by the dark bill tips, and we had good but distant views of them.

Starting to chum, we had most of the same species as two days earlier, albeit in lower numbers. Flesh-footed Shearwaters squabbled at the back of the boat, while Cook's Petrels flew past and White-faced Storm Petrels formed a feeding flock over the slick. A single NZ Storm Petrel showed well, flying around the

boat for several hours. A pod of Bottlenose Dolphins were visible in the far distance in the glassy conditions.



New Zealand Storm Petrel. Mathieu Poot.

We moved in closer to some nearby Islands and had two Little Shearwaters fly past, as well as a Pycroft's Petrel sitting on the water (identified later off pictures). This was our last realistic chance at both of these species, so we were very happy to get them on the list. Several Bryde's Whales were seen feeding on the way back in – the perfect way to cap off an amazing day.

## 6 November 2024 – Day Five

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Another early start had us heading South again, this time for Gulf Harbour. We grabbed our overnight bags and boarded our ferry to Tiritiri Matangi Island, one of the crown jewels of New Zealand's conservation estate!

After arriving on the island, we listened to the Welcome Introduction with North Island Saddleback, Whitehead and Tui flying in the background. We started our walk and soon found a fernbird by a small pond, a Stitchbird at a sugar feeder, friendly North Island Robins, a Giant Weta and had brief views of a Kokako (Our first banknote bird! – the \$50). We stopped for lunch by the Bunkhouse, assuming that being

the hottest part of the day, the birding would slow down. The birds didn't seem to know this however, as a Takahe appeared out of the bushes nearby. This was followed by great views of a Kokako, more Fernbirds, Brown Quail and a pair of Riflemen flying back and forth to their nest under the bunkhouse toilets. The addition of Riflemen to the list meant that we had seen a member of all six of New Zealand's endemic bird families, and it was only day five!



On the hunt for Kokako

Heading out for our afternoon walk, the Island was much quieter as the day visitors and school groups had headed home. We walked towards the Northern end of the Island, seeing our first Red-crowned Parakeets and having great views of Stitchbirds at the various feeders. We also saw a large Tuatara sitting outside its burrow which would have been more than 100 years old! Tuatara are the only member of one of the four orders of reptiles, making them incredibly unique and a real treat for us to see. As we got to the Northern tip of the island the bush opened and we came out into a large area of Flax which was having a magnificent bloom. We had Stitchbirds, Saddlebacks, Parakeets, Bellbirds and Tui all feeding on the Flax flowers, allowing great photography opportunities. Walking down the hill, we spent some time at a small pond with a few Brown Teal on it. Several Spotless Crakes were moving through the Flax bordering the pond and after some time we had had good views of this tricky species. On the way back we had our best views yet of Kokako, and a tip off from another walker gave us average views of a roosting Morepork.

A few drinks and a traditional BBQ dinner had us refuelled and ready to head out chasing our next Kiwi species – the Little Spotted Kiwi. We quietly walked the tracks getting great views of a confiding Morepork, before we paused to listen to something rustling by the edge of the track. Before long a Kiwi jumped up and ran across the track right in front of us! We continued down towards the coast and found Little Blue Penguins and more Tuatara before heading back to the bunkhouse for the night.



Morepork. Ron Pozzi

## 7 November 2024 – Day Six

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Our earliest morning so far, we were up at 0530 to hear the dawn chorus. We were certainly not disappointed and had Whitehead, Bellbird, Tui, North Island Saddleback, Kokako and many other species singing around us. After watching a group of Tui chasing each other, and having more great views of Kokako, we headed back to the Bunkhouse to have breakfast and pack up. A few of us went to look for Takahē again, and we quickly found the nearby pair as well as seeing an Australian Magpie unsuccessfully attempt to feed a Giant Weta to its fledgling.



Tui on flax. Ron Pozzi

We headed down to the Wharf, seeing Kokako yet again, and watching Eagle Rays cruising the shallows while we waited for the boat. A short boat ride found us back on the mainland, and we headed for the airport, stopping on the way to grab some pies for lunch. It was then time to say goodbye to Matt, and hello to Sav, who was joining us as the guide for the remainder of the trip.

Leaving the airport, we headed to a local estuary and a well-known wader spot. A colony of Black-billed Gulls and large roost of Red Knots provided our first views of both these species. Large numbers of Bar-tailed Godwit, South Island Pied and Variable Oystercatcher and a lone Ruddy Turnstone were also great to see.

From here we headed South to our Motel for the night. We stopped at a few locations on route to dinner, but the low tide meant that the wading birds in this area were spread over a vast area of mudflats. Nothing new or unusual was seen so we continued on to our pub dinner to cap off another busy day.

## 8 November 2024 – Day Seven

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Our first stop of the day was a local wetland holding Pied Stilt, Paradise Shelduck and Royal Spoonbill. A recently renovated Bird Hide provided great views, and after some time Ron spotted a Glossy Ibis. We

continued on, stopping at a lake and then on to lunch where disaster struck. The bakery's oven wasn't working, so no pies!

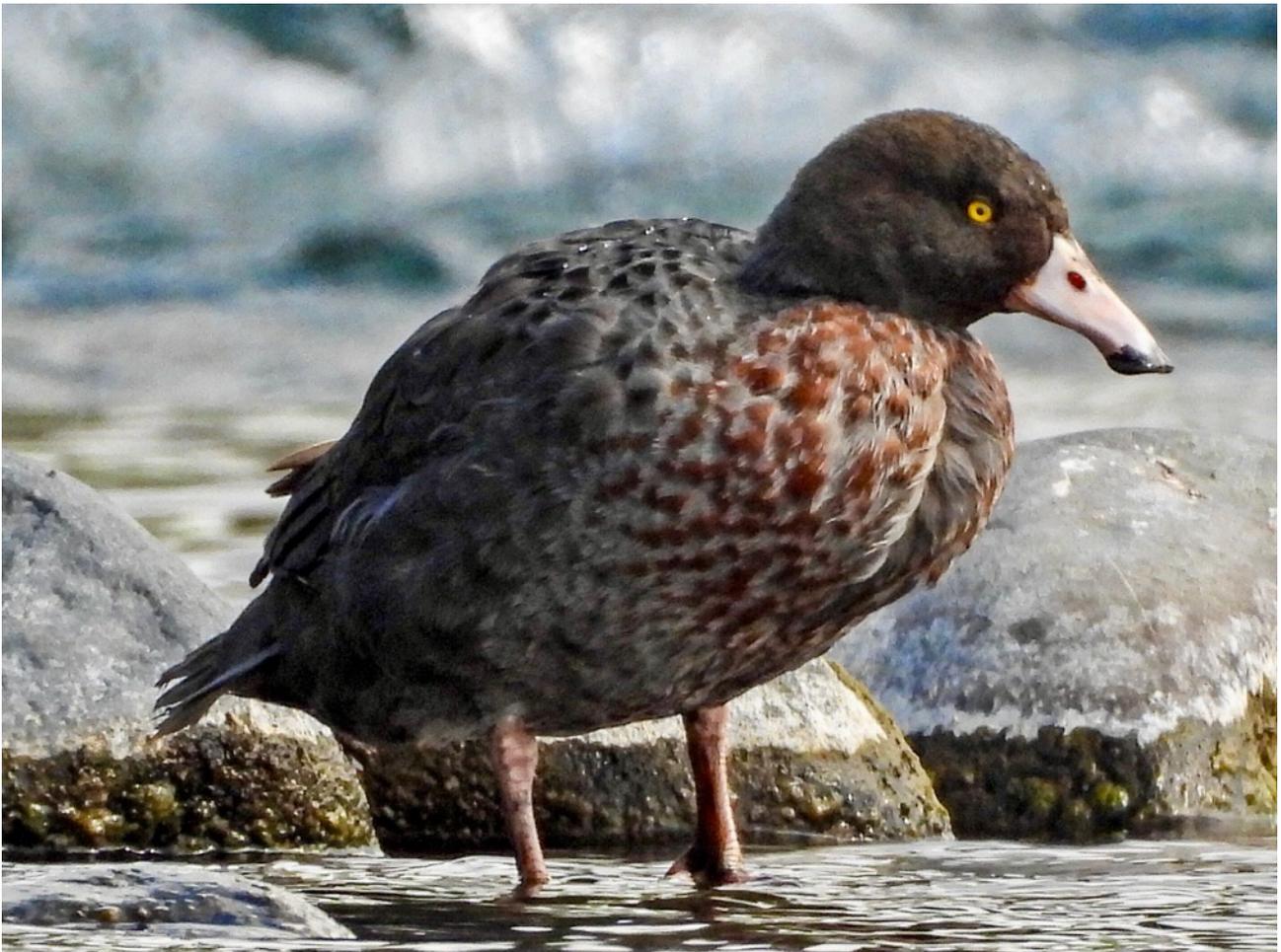


Royal Spoonbill. Ron Pozzi

We arrived at our main birding location for the day, a beautiful area of native bush holding a number of interesting endemics. At our first stop we were hoping for Cuckoos and after a little patience we had views of Shining Cuckoo, and then a flying Long-tailed Cuckoo. Better views desired, but a great bird to add to the list. Shortly after we had our first Yellowhammer, an uncharacteristically late tick for this species. The next stop provided another yet another addition to the list, with great views of Yellow-crowned Parakeet.

We took a stroll in a patch of old growth forest, watching Kaka and marvelling at the giant Podocarp trees. A climb up a tower gave stunning views out over the canopy of the forest. Leaving the forest, we stopped back in at our Cuckoo spot and found an obliging Tomtit, a species we had heard a lot but not seen yet.

Next up was a river near the motel, we spotted a pair of Blue Ducks from a bridge and made our way down to the riverbank for great views of this iconic species. A flyover from a NZ Falcon shortly after gave us our next two banknote birds, the \$10 Blue Duck and \$20 Falcon, in short succession!



Blue Duck. Ron Pozzi

After finding the Blue Ducks so quickly, we made the most of our extra time and headed to a large reedbed. Getting out of the van we immediately heard booming Australasian Bittern – our target bird. After some time spent searching, with Fernbird to keep us entertained, we saw a pair of Australasian Harrier fly out over the reed bed. First one, then a second large bird flushed out of the reeds below – Bitterns! A great way to finish off a busy day filled with some fantastic species.

## 9 November 2024 – Day Eight

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An early start for some, as we headed back to the reedbed to try our luck for Bittern again. A few had missed last night's birds, so we were super keen to get this tricky bird ticked off for everyone. Once again, we could hear booming on arrival, and after little waiting, we had a Bittern fly past us and land in the reeds. We could see its head sticking up in a classic Bittern pose and got good looks and a few pictures.

Then it was back to the motel, breakfast and time to hit the road. We stopped to look for Fernbird, and then again to tick Mute Swan, before arriving at a large estuary. A number of rare waders had been reported here recently so the anticipation and excitement levels were high. We quickly found a group of

Bar-tailed Godwit with a lone Red Knot and then had the first of many Rook fly past. The next spot turned out to be the star of the show with great scope views of the targeted Double Banded Plover, Wrybill and Black-fronted Dotterel. These were joined by Little Egret, Red-necked Stint, Sharp-tailed Sandpiper, Curlew Sandpiper - uncommon birds for New Zealand. The wind picked up quite considerably at this spot but we hunkered down, with no one wanting to leave such an amazing place. A White Heron (seen by some) and a group of Pacific Golden Plover on the walk out capped off a very productive day of waders.

After settling into the motel, we headed to Sav and Jody's House for dinner. A few drinks, laughs and a BBQ later, we were off to bed to dream about rare waders.

## 10 November 2024 – Day Nine

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Traveling from the East to the West Coast, we had a decent drive ahead of us. We stopped in at a small wetland, looking for Crake, but with high water levels we had no luck. Great views of NZ Scaup, NZ Dabchick and other waterfowl was a good consolation prize.

With a quick stop on route, to see some Feral Peafowl, we continued west with the rain increasing as we entered the Manawatu – traditional weather for this area! We headed to a lake, but it was closed due to a rahui, so we headed for the motel to check in instead.

We chilled for a bit, and then were back out into the rain, stopping in at a couple of ponds before heading to a large estuary. We had great looks at Wrybill and views of Bar-tailed Godwit and a single Red Knot. Unfortunately, the rain got the better of Ron's camera which decided to stop working. A small tide meant few waders were turning up, so back to the motel, a nice meal and then bed.

## 11 November 2024 – Day Ten

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We headed South towards the capital city, stopping at a small estuary along the way. The expected flock of White-fronted Terns was nowhere to be seen, but we found some Variable Oystercatchers, and NZ Dotterel chicks running around the dunes. We had a few more stops with nothing noteworthy being seen, checked in for our ferry and got ourselves ready for the Cook Straight crossing.

As we left the harbour we had brief views of a pair of Short-beaked Common Dolphins, as well as White-fronted Tern and Fluttering Shearwater. A mixed flock of Hutton's and Fluttering Shearwater was seen by some, a great opportunity to see the differences between these two tricky species. A light wind made things a bit chilly for us but was great for the birds, with White-capped Albatross and plenty of Fairy Prions and Sooty Shearwaters being seen. Some large dark Petrels started coming past, initially being too far away to separate between Westland and White-chinned. Garret soon managed to get a good photo, clearly showing a dark bill tip – Westland Petrel. Shortly thereafter a huge Whale spout was seen in the distance, based on the size and shape it was identified as a Blue Whale!

Entering the Marlborough Sounds, we marvelled at the dramatic landscape and saw NZ Fur Seals on the rocks and Spotted Shags flying past. We reached Picton, checked in and headed out for a delicious dinner.



Arapaoa Island, Marlborough Sounds. Ron Pozzi

## 12 November 2024 – Day Eleven

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A short walk down to the nearby marina had us straight onto our boat and out into the Sounds. It was a beautiful sunny day, flat calm, perfect conditions for spotting things on the water. We quickly found some Little Blue Penguins and shortly after, brief views of some Dusky Dolphins. We headed to a nearby Spotted Shag roost and found a trifecta of King Shags sitting with them. This is the rarest cormorant in the world, with a population of 6-700, and is found only in the Marlborough Sounds, so a great bird to add to the list! We continued down the Sound seeing Arctic Skuas chasing White-fronted Terns, a much larger group of King Shags as well as a brief look at a Hector's Dolphin.

Arriving at an island, we disembarked the boat (getting our feet wet in the process) and headed ashore. We watched a pair of Weka feeding a worm to their chick while Mat found two Waiharakeke Grass Skinks under a log on the beach. Moving up into the bush we soon found our target species – the Orange-fronted Parakeet. This critically endangered species was thought to have gone extinct twice in the past, a real treat

to see. We watched a pair feeding their chick and had a minimum count of five of these amazing birds. With our target species in the bag, we went for a bit of a wander, seeing Bellbird, a NZ Pigeon carrying nesting material and our first South Island Saddleback.



Weka. Ron Pozzi

Arriving back on the mainland, we grabbed some pies for lunch and hit the road South. Our first stop was the local poo ponds, where we looked for the introduced Cirl Bunting, unfortunately with no luck. A small group of Glossy ibis were a good consolation prize, as well as nesting Royal Spoonbill and general waterfowl. Next stop was a lake where we saw Hoary-headed Grebe (a new native restricted to this lake) as well as NZ Dabchick and a range of waterfowl.

We continued on, stopping at a lookout over a NZ Fur Seal colony. The pups were suckling and playing in their nursery pool, while a few adult females kept watch nearby. White-fronted Terns, Red-billed Gulls and Spotted Shags nesting on nearby rocks allowed for great close-up views and photos. We arrived at our destination for the next few days and headed to the tip of the peninsula for a brief sea watch. Distant views of Northern Giant Petrel, White-capped Albatross and Hutton's Shearwater capped off an amazing day.

We headed out to a sea-food oriented dinner, sampling Crayfish, Mussels, Fish, Calamari and Paua, before heading to bed.



Orange-fronted Parakeet. Ron Pozzi



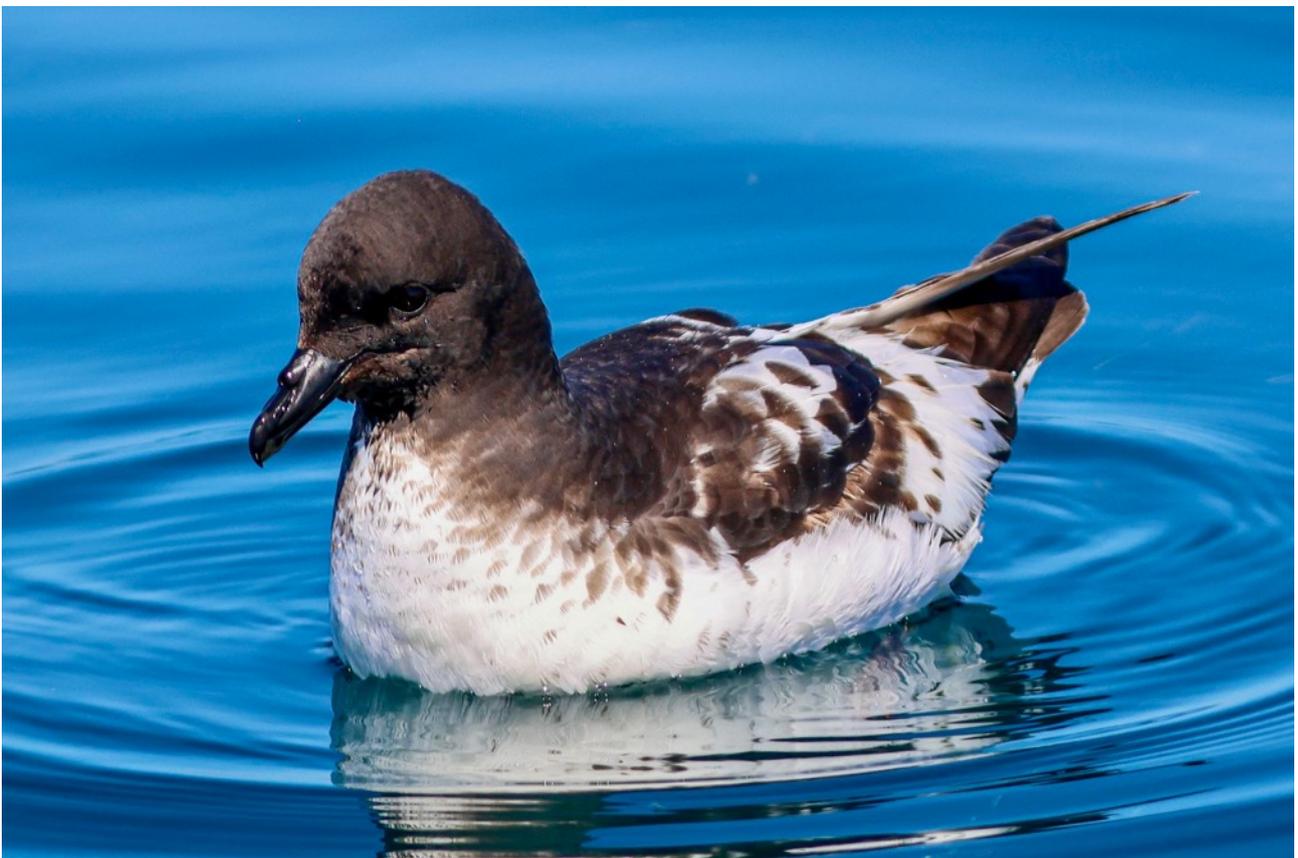
NZ Fur Seal pup. Ron Pozzi

## 13 November 2024 – Day Twelve

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We headed for the top of a nearby peninsula and had a quick look for Cirl Bunting. Having no luck, we checked in for our pelagic trip and headed to the marina.

After a quick look in the nearby rockpools, we boarded the boat and left the marina, heading out to sea. White-capped Albatrosses and Northern Giant Petrel followed the boat most of the way out. We started chumming and soon had Northern and Southern Royal Albatross, Wandering Albatross, Cape Petrel and Westland Petrel surrounding the boat. We detoured close to shore on the way back and found some very obliging Hector's Dolphins – the smallest Oceanic Dolphins in the world.



Cape Petrel. Ron Pozzi

A quick stop for lunch and most of us were back on the boat for the afternoon pelagic. A little more wind meant the birds were very active. We saw the same species as the morning with the addition of a Black-browed Albatross, Short-tailed Shearwater, Grey-faced Petrel, White-chinned Petrel and a Snowy Albatross! A large pod of Dusky Dolphins was encountered on the way home, surrounding the boat and wowing us with their acrobatics.



Snowy Albatross. Ron Pozzi



Dusky Dolphin. Pat Cummings

We had a traditional kiwi dinner – fish and chips – before heading out at dusk to look for Little Owls. We found a likely looking spot and started searching. No luck initially and we weren't feeling confident as darkness approached. With darkness upon us, we called it quits and started loading the van. Ron had other ideas however, and came through with a buzzer beater spot in the dying light. We all bino'ed in on a distant power pole for silhouette views of a Little Owl.

## 14 November 2024 – Day Thirteen

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After getting up and loading the van, we headed South. A brief stop at a lagoon was quiet, so we continued to a large Estuary. A walk around the Estuary netted us the endemic Black-fronted Tern, as well as more Wrybill, Banded Dotterel, Bar-tailed Godwit and White-fronted Tern. Jenny had a brief foray into a patch of deep mud on the way back to the car.

We left the estuary and headed West towards the Southern Alps, stopping at a “World Famous” pie shop to sample the best pies of the trip so far! Passing stunning scenery, we headed up into the Alps with the rain starting and then increasing as we gained altitude. Arriving in a small village we started looking for our main target species of the day – an endemic alpine Parrot called a Kea. There were none in the village, or the first few spots we checked, and we started worrying they might be hiding from the rain somewhere. We carried on to a lookout point and as we arrived could see people taking photographs of something - Kea! An inquisitive young bird took an interest in the van, providing great photo opportunities as it nibbled our windscreen wipers.



Girls and Parrots. Mathieu Poot.

We took a short walk in a nearby forest, but it was very quiet in the continuing rain. Another scenic drive down the other side of the alps was next, before checking in, having dinner and heading to bed. No doubt to dream of Kea.

## 15 November 2024 – Day Fourteen

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With plans for the next few days changed, due to slips closing a major road, we headed back the way we had come. A stop in the same forest was still quiet, with one or two rifleman and Tomtit around.

Arriving back in the village, we found a group of Kea misbehaving outside the cafe. More great interactions and photos with these amazing birds, an impromptu coffee break, and we headed on.

Next stop was another forest walk, with plenty of Fantail and Grey Warbler, as well as our first South Island Robin. We also found a Giant Native Earthwork under a log and had a probable Falcon flyby, seen by some.

A big drive followed, which had us arriving mid-afternoon at a Lake Tekapo. We were on the hunt for the Black Stilt - the rarest wading bird in the world! We headed down a gravel road, checking various ponds and wetlands, finally spotting a few distant birds. Great scope views were had of an adult pair, as well as two juveniles.

## 16 November 2024 – Day Fifteen

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After piling into the van, we headed back to the same lake as yesterday, stopping at a bakery for breakfast. We drove up a nearby hill, finding a little snow at the top, as well as fantastic views. With freezing temperatures encouraging everyone back into the van, we headed off, seeing a Chukar on the way down.

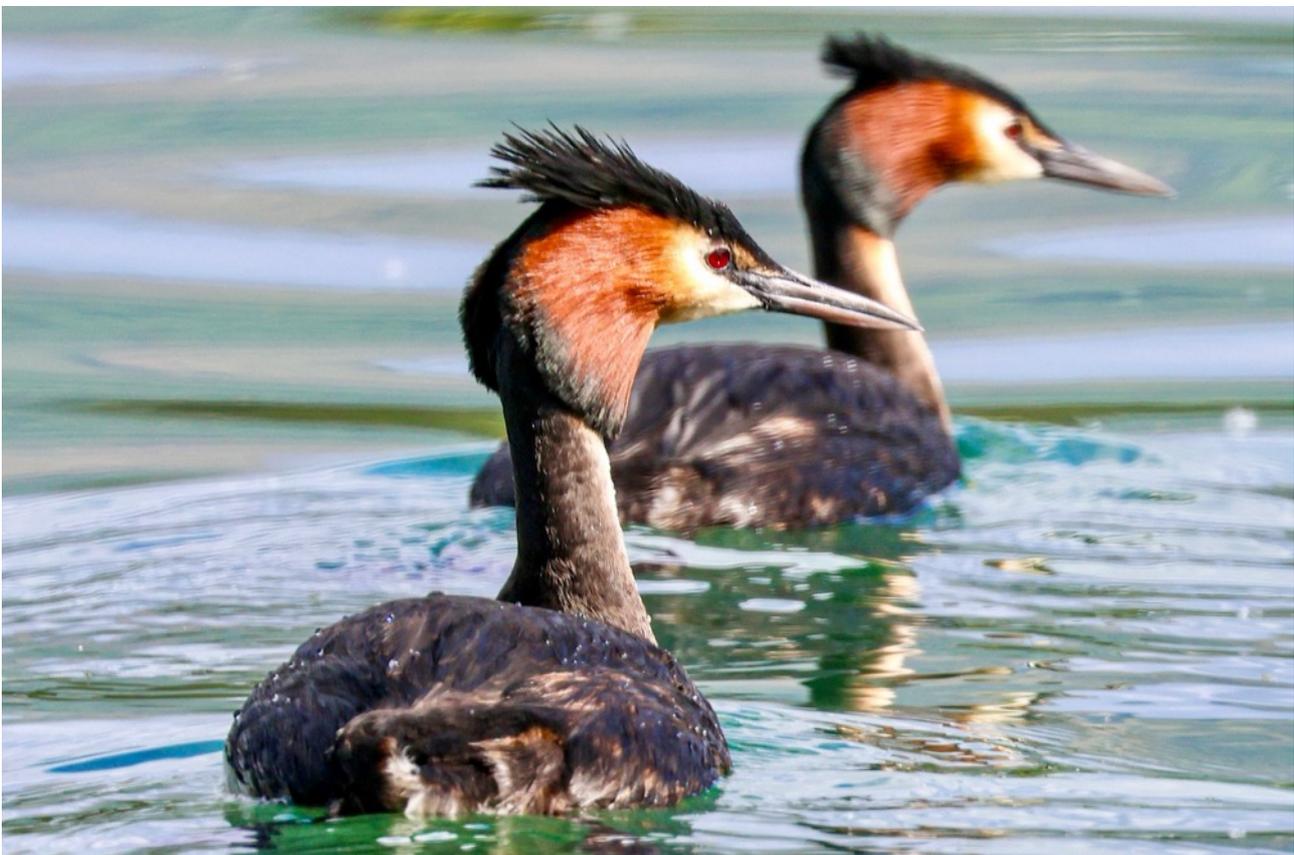
We followed the lake up to a large river, finding high water levels and few birds. A few Black-fronted Terns, gulls and a pair of South Island Oystercatchers flew around.

We carried on to Lake Pukaki, checking out canals and salmon farms, and getting great views of Black-fronted Terns. Reaching the top of the lake, we had Wrybill, Banded Dotterel and Black-billed Gulls.

We stopped at a marina close to our accommodation and watched some nest-building Great Crested Grebes. These birds won the prestigious NZ Bird of the Year competition in 2023 with a landslide victory.



Black-fronted Tern. Pat Cummings



Great Crested Grebes. Ron Pozzi

## 17 November 2024 – Day Sixteen

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With a big day of driving ahead of us, we hit the road early. Crossing the Crown Range, we stopped at a viewpoint and had brief views of a Falcon from the van. We got lunch in Te Anau then continued towards Milford Sound, passing stunning scenery as we drove up into the Mountains. We made a quick stop at a campsite and found a Black-tailed Native Hen or “Turbo Chook”. A rare vagrant that had shown up recently, NZ’s 9<sup>th</sup> record of this species.

We arrived at the site we would look for our main target - Rock Wren. After a quick briefing and a little waiting, Mandy spotted one up the slope, with another appearing shortly after. We waited as the birds moved down the slope and were rewarded with great close views of the pair bouncing on the rocks.



Towering Southern Alps, near Milford Sound

With Rock Wren in the bag pretty quickly, we decided to head down into Milford Sound, stopping for Kea on the way. We took some photos at the waterfront of the stunning scenery, and had our first Brown Creeper in the surrounding trees.

We wound our way back towards Te Anau making lots of small stops. We checked out some viewpoints and walked in some amazing forest, seeing Tomtit and South Island Robin.

## 18 November 2024 – Day Seventeen

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Another early start as we headed for Bluff. Arriving with a bit of time to spare, we drove to the end of State Highway 1, before checking in for our ferry. The crossing was calm and quiet on the bird front. We had Bottlenose dolphins soon after leaving the harbour, common diving-petrels, a single Cape Petrel and Gulls.

We left our bags at the accommodation, grabbed lunch and headed to our water taxi. Following along the coastline, we soon spotted a few Fiordland Crested Penguins! A fantastic tick, great photos and Mat's 200th NZ bird.

We arrived on Ulva Island with four hours up our sleeve and decided to do a big walk across the Island. We quickly came across our main target species; Yellowhead (the \$100 banknote bird). They were high in the canopy and difficult to spot at first, but after moving further along the path we had great views at eye level. Next we had both Red and Yellow-crowned Parakeet, Kaka and a Saddleback pair and juvenile (Jackbird) as well as many other forest species. Various other wildlife was seen including a NZ Sealion and Blue Cod.



Yellowhead. Ron Pozzi

After getting dropped off in Golden Bay, we walked over the hill to our accommodation and had a great dinner to end a busy day.

## 19 November 2024 – Day Eighteen

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We met outside the local Supermarket, picked up our lunch and boarded our boat for the day. We had another look at the penguins from yesterday then headed out to sea. As we passed by an Island, the Brown Skua entertained us; with one flying close over the boat and another dive-bombing Weka.

Arriving at an offshore reef, we started chumming and despite low wind conditions, soon had good numbers of birds around us. Birds seen for the day included White-capped, Salvin's and Southern Royal Albatross, Sooty Shearwater, Short-tailed Shearwater and Cook's Petrel. Common Diving-petrel, Northern Giant Petrel, Black-browed and Campbell Albatross.



Southern Royal Albatross showing a juvenile White-capped Albatross who's boss. Ron Pozzi.

On the way in we passed the same Island and spotted a Yellow-eyed Penguin on the beach. It showed well, making its way down the beach and swimming off, and was our last Banknote Bird (the \$5)! Soon after we saw Little Blue Penguins, making this a three-Penguin day! We came in close to a Foveaux Shag colony, getting great views and spotting an interesting Tern on the rocks. After some discussion it was identified as an Arctic Tern.

Back to the accommodation, dinner and then were out Kiwi spotting once again. Cold rain and wind greeted us at the spot, and hopes were not high. We persevered and eventually found a young male feeding in the long grass. Brief views of a female running away were next, and we heard a third bird.



Ocean-ready

## 20 November – Day Nineteen

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We checked in our bags, jumped onto the ferry and began crossing the Foveaux Strait. There was a lot more wind than our last crossing and a lot more birds as a result. We started seeing Sooty Shearwaters and Common Diving-petrels as well as White-capped Albatross and a few Cook's Petrel. As the wind and chop continued increasing, a Mottled Petrel ripped past us, giving brief views of the diagnostic dark belly. Sav then picked out a distant Broad-billed Prion flying with a couple of Fairy Prions.

After the ferry we retrieved the van and headed north with a decent drive ahead of us. Arriving at a Penguin colony, we went for a short walk and had good distant views of two Yellow-eyed Penguins. One travelling from the colony to sea, and one from sea inland. A few Otago and Spotted Shags flew past offshore. A sudden rainstorm on the walk back caught out Mat and Jenny with no raincoats.

We checked out another Penguin Colony, then on to a large Otago Shag colony before checking into the motel.

## 21 November – Day Twenty

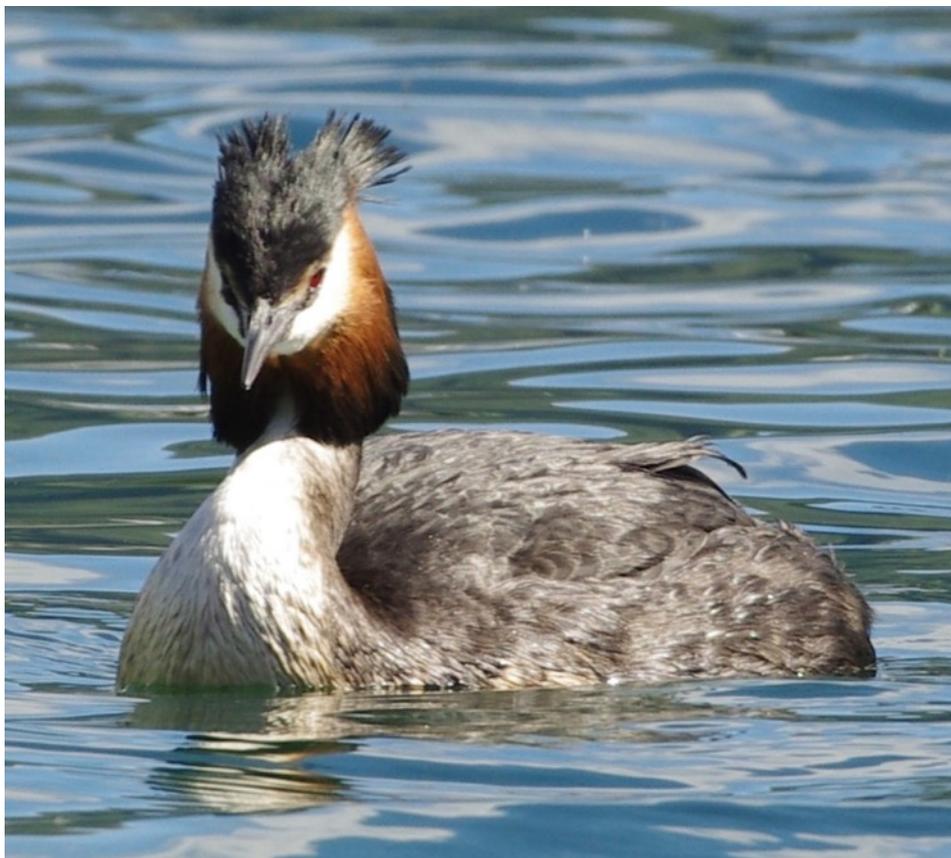
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Up and on the road. We headed North and then inland, with our first stop at the famous Fairlie Bakehouse. With breakfast/lunch secured, we arrived in Tekapo and started looking for Black Stilts. We checked a few different spots, finding general waterfowl and getting snowed on. Eventually we found a pair of distant Black Stilts, allowing good scope views.

We stopped in at a local salmon farm, getting great close views of NZ Scaup, Black-billed Gulls and Great Crested Grebe. A quick look for Marsh Crake found the water levels too high once again, so we headed off to our accommodation. A few drinks and our final dinner together.



Black-billed Gull. Ron Pozzi



Great Crested Grebe. Pat Cummings

## 22 November 2024 – Day Twenty-One

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We woke to a stunning day and had great views of Mt Cook as we drove along Lake Pukaki. We turned inland and after a few stops arrived at a park for our last-ditch attempt at Cirl Bunting. A group of school kids were using the park, thwarting our plan.

We headed to the airport, dropping off Mandy, Garret, Ron and Pat, then to some nearby hotels to drop off Jenny, John and Marsha. Hard to believe the trip had come to an end. Some great birds and birders and an awesome trip!

We finished the trip on 159 species.



The Team. Mathieu Poot.