

# Tour report

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22 October – 11 November 2022

21-day tour with BIRDFINDERS and Wrybill Birding Tours, NZ



Led by Dave Howes, Wrybill Birding Tours, NZ

## Participants

Vaughan & Svetlana Ashby, Doug & Margaret Bell, Adrian & Christine Blagden, Alan Boyle,  
Robert Carr, Phil Espin, Keith Fisher, Brian & Christine Shaw and Andy Sims

## Images

Dave Howes, Andy Sims

This 21-day tour was arranged by Birdfinders and organised and led by Wrybill Birding Tours, NZ. We were really lucky with the weather on our tour with all four of the scheduled pelagics going ahead and no real time lost to rain. The birds played their part too with us seeing 146 species, with 65 of those being endemic species during the course of the tour. We were a bit light in the seabird department and dipped on Pycroft's Petrel and Buller's Albatross, but you can't win 'em all! We were lucky to get views of four kiwi species, although not all of the group got on to all of them.

All in all, a great trip with a great group of birders.

**Dave Howes** (Wrybill Birding Tours, NZ leader)



## 22 October 2022 – Day One

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A sunny morning had us leaving Auckland at around 7:30am with a short drive to our first stop on the upper Waitemata harbour where a Shore Plover had been reported over several days about a week earlier. Alas, it had moved on but the group got their first taste of some waders with a few endemics in the form of South Island Pied and Variable Oystercatchers to get the ball rolling. From here we moved on to one of the west coast beaches where we had great views of NZ Dotterel, NZ Pigeon and Shining Cuckoo with views of Australasian Gannets and Pied Shags flying past offshore. Our next stop was the gannet colony which is amazing with over 1000 Australasian Gannets present with many of them building nests or sitting on eggs. We got great views of circa 300 White-fronted Terns displaying and nest building as well as close views of Tui in the flax around the gannet colony.



A pair of gannets allopreening. Dave Howes.

After a lunch stop we headed north with a stop at a wetland where we got looks at most of the more common waterfowl like Black Swan, Paradise Shelduck, Mallards, NZ Scaup, Australasian Shelduck and Canada Geese as well NZ Dabchick, Grey Warbler and Royal Spoonbill. Then it was time to head to our accommodation, unload our bags, freshen up and head out for a great dinner. It had been a pretty big day and with jetlag kicking in, I think the whole group was happy to head off to bed to dream about gannets and the pelagic trip the following day.

We ended the day on 49 species of which 10 were endemic.

## 23 October 2022 – Day Two

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After picking up lunch at a nearby café, we headed down to Sandspit for our Hauraki Gulf pelagic, the first of four for the trip. We were joined on the boat by Phil Hammond, another of Wrybill's guides and his 2 clients as well as 4 day trippers. We headed out towards Kawau Island in near windless conditions which were great for boating but less than ideal for seabirds! The flat, glassy conditions did make it easy to spot Little Penguins and it didn't take long until we had 2 or 3 fairly close to the boat. Everyone loves penguins so we spent a bit of time watching and photographing the world's smallest penguin before leaving them to carry on with their feeding. The calm conditions meant we didn't have the usual numbers of birds flying around but as we headed out we started picking up Buller's, Flesh-footed and Fluttering Shearwater, White-faced Storm Petrels and Common Diving Petrels.



NZ Storm Petrel showing off in glassy conditions. Dave Howes.

We stopped next to a huge raft of birds comprising hundreds of Fluttering Shearwaters, a fair number of Buller's Shearwaters and were able to pick out a couple Sooty and Little Shearwaters. We moved on to a chum spot and after chumming for a while had a nice slick going which slowly started to attract the stormies and other birds. Several Cook's Petrels flew past and we had 1 Black (Parkinson's) Petrel come in to investigate. At one point we counted about 160 White-faced Storm Petrels around the boat and then, out of nowhere, a New Zealand Storm Petrel showed up,

followed soon after by two more. They put on a great show around the boat and the beauty of a calm day is that, if you can attract the birds, they often hang around the boat for longer and in the case of the stormies, will often feed towards you rather than straight down the slick, allowing for great photo opportunities. We made a stop at Kawau Island on the way back to Sandspit, seeing the resident Peafowl and hearing Weka calling in the surrounding bush. Another night and another great meal in Warkworth and once again a good night's sleep for some tired bodies!

## 24 October 2022 – Day Three

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We carried on northwards via one of Auckland's predator free sanctuaries. At a small creek the group had great views of Brown Teal and Buff-banded rail with a brief flyover from a Kaka. A short bush walk saw us add some endemics like Whitehead, North Island Saddleback, NZ Pigeon, Bellbird, NZ Fantail and another Kaka. Along the road and in the surrounding paddocks we also saw Swamp Harrier, White-faced Heron, Pukeko and a host of introduced passerines.

Further north we stopped at an estuary for lunch and after a short walk we were rewarded with good views of a NZ Fairy Tern, one of only about 40 remaining birds in the world. We also had some waders in the form of Bar-tailed Godwits, Red Knot, Ruddy Turnstone, NZ Dotterel and both oystercatchers. We carried on heading north with a quick stop at a small manmade lake where we had a mixed bag of waterfowl including NZ Dabchick and Australasian Little Grebe. An hour or so later, we checked in to the motel at our northernmost point of the tour and headed out for an early dinner after which we set out to look for the first Kiwi of the trip. We walked into the spot just as the last of the light was fading and didn't have to wait too long before we had Morepork calling, although we never saw one and shortly after, we heard our first male North Island Brown Kiwi call. We found one foraging next to the path a few minutes later with all the group getting good views of the bird. We slowly made our way back to the van, getting views of another 3 birds along the way. All in all another successful, if quite a long day.

## 25 October 2022 – Day Four

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After getting snarled up in some rather frustrating roadworks and having to make a 40 minute detour, we were on our way to Marsden Cove for our second pelagic of the trip. We headed into deeper water than on our first trip and there was a fair amount more breeze so we were hopeful we'd extend the pelagic species list.

After getting the chum going, we soon had Cook's Petrels flying by as well as White-faced Storm Petrels and Fairy Prions feeding in the slick. The most prolific bird feeding on the chum was by the Flesh-footed Shearwater, but a NZ Storm Petrel, Grey-faced and Black Petrels and a White-capped Albatross (our first for the trip) also put in appearances.



White-faced Storm Petrel dancing. Dave Howes.

A great day out was again capped off with a great meal in a local restaurant and another good night's sleep.

## 26 October 2022 – Day Five

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After breakfast we headed down to Gulf Harbour for the short ferry trip across to Tiritiri Matangi. The ferry trip was fairly quiet from a birding perspective with a few gannets and the odd Fluttering Shearwater. Once on the island we stowed our bags in the ranger's truck, had the biosecurity briefing and started heading up the track to the bunkhouse. The walk was great with us getting superb views of Stitchbird, Bellbird, NI Saddleback, NI Robin and a pair of NI Kokako. We had to hurry the last part of the walk to make our rendezvous time with the ranger at the bunkhouse for a Health and Safety and general briefing as were going to be staying the night. We spent the afternoon walking around the island with some of group opting for shorter walks. The birds kept giving and we had another 2 pairs of Kokako who posed beautifully for the photographers, a roosting Morepork, Red-crowned Parakeets, Brown Quail, Whitehead, Tui, Bellbird, Grey Warbler and loads of NZ Pigeon.

We had a relaxed barbecue and a beer or two at the bunkhouse, with everyone chipping in to help which was fantastic. Our evening walk gave us views of a huge tuatara and a Brown Teal but the Little Spotted Kiwi were playing hard ball and we only heard one call. Most of the group decided to call it a night and myself and 2 dedicated members of the team continued. As luck would have it, we found a kiwi less than 10 minutes later the rest of the group departed and it gave us excellent, if rather brief views. As we were walking away, feeling rather pleased with ourselves, a rustling in the flax drew our attention and when I put the red light on it, a fernbird popped into view about a metre away and just sat and looked at us – what a finish to an already awesome day.

## 27 October 2022 – Day Six

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Mornings on Tiri generally start early, a combination of the joys of bunkhouse accommodation and wanting to get up early for the dawn chorus, which on Tiri, is unbelievable. Our morning birding gave us views of a Takahe with a chick, a couple of Brown Teal and a Rifleman behind the bunkhouse. Our water taxi arrived at 10:00am and we said our goodbyes to Tiri knowing it really had looked after us in terms of bird sightings.



Sunrise on Tiri

We carried on southwards with a stop on the Manukau harbour with the focus being waders. We certainly weren't disappointed with big numbers of Bar-tailed Godwits and Red Knot as well as Ruddy Turnstone, Pied Stilt, NZ Dotterel, Royal Spoonbill, oystercatchers and our first Wrybill and Black-billed Gulls. Our next stop was Miranda, where unfortunately it was dead low tide and the birds were spread far and wide across the extensive mud flats. A little way along the coast we had some very confiding Wrybill, much to the photographer's delight as well as a leucistic SI Pied Oystercatcher. After a dinner of fish and chips, we retired after another successful day.

## 28 October 2022 – Day Seven

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Up early and back to the hides at Miranda as the tide was somewhat better. Lots of godwits, knots and stilts with quite a few Wrybill around. We also had small flock of Pacific Golden Plover fly over. We eventually left the waders to feed on the incoming tide to continue our journey south, stopping briefly at a dam to look for waterfowl before heading to an area of native forest for lunch. While having lunch we had Kaka flying overhead making their characteristic screech as well as a brief view of a pair of Yellow-crowned Parakeets flying over. A bit of a walk after lunch produced great views of Yellow-crowned Parakeets, Tui, NI Robin, Grey Warbler and more Kaka and fleeting glimpse of a Long-tailed Cuckoo that wasn't hanging around for the paparazzi.



Blue Duck pair. Andy Sims.



On our way in to Turangi we tried a couple spots on the river for Blue Duck without any luck, but after dinner 2 keen birders and I went out again and had excellent views of a pair of ducks from one of the bridges over the river.

## 29 October 2022 – Day Eight

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An early, pre-breakfast start had us back down at the river where the pair of blue ducks put on a great show for us. After spending some time watching them and many photos, we moved to a spot on the lake. We not only had views of a host of waterfowl, including our first Eurasian Coot, but also had good, if distant views of 3 or 4 Australasian Bittern and heard about the same number booming around us. On our way back to breakfast, we made a brief and rather misty stop in some native forest where we had excellent views of Tomtit, Whitehead and Kaka.



Pied stilt in Hawkes Bay. Dave Howes.

After breakfast we headed back along Lake Taupo, stopping to look for NZ Fernbird, which didn't let us down and we also heard another bittern booming nearby. The rain set in as we continued our journey so we gave up on another spot of native forest as it looked a bit gloomy. Into Hawkes Bay and a couple wader spots yielded our first Banded Dotterel (Double-banded Plover) and Black-fronted Dotterel for the trip as well as a surprise White-winged Black Tern. We checked in to our

motel a bit earlier than usual which gave everyone time to catch up on a bit of laundry etc before heading out for another great dinner.

## 30 October 2022 – Day Nine

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A fairly casual start saw us heading out in overcast, blustery conditions to a local lookout point where the resident NZ Pipits put on quite show for us. A short drive to a nearby wetland had us mainly looking at waterfowl as the recent rains had left water levels really high meaning there was no exposed mud for the frequently seen crakes to feed on.

From here we had one of the longer driving days as we headed over to Foxton on the west coast. We picked up some lunch on the way which we ate at the estuary. Once again the tide was quite far out so the waders were spread out and a long way away and fairly difficult to find. After an hour or two of wader watching, we returned to our motel where we enjoyed a leisurely barbeque and cold beer or two.



Royal Spoonbill in Foxton. Dave Howes.

## 31 October 2022 – Day Ten

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We left Foxton for Wellington to catch the ferry to Picton and stopped at a water treatment plant on the way. The weather was a bit drizzly but all the waterfowl we expected were there as well as a pair of Black-fronted Dotterel. From here, the new Transmission Gully highway had us in Wellington way ahead of schedule so we headed to a local reserve in the hope of seeing one of the resident NZ Falcons which had eluded us up until now. Alas, today was not our day for falcon, but we did have good views of Tui, NZ Pigeon, Kaka, Red-crowned Parakeet and a Shining Cuckoo. From here it was straight on to the ferry to cross the Cook Strait. This can be a particularly nasty stretch of water at times but we were fortunate and had a smooth crossing. The birding was fairly slow but we did have Fluttering Shearwaters, Silver Gull, Australasian Gannets and our first Westland Petrel.

Once in to Queen Charlotte Sound, the water was glassy calm with hundreds of Fluttering Shearwaters and an Arctic Skua harassing a flock of White-fronted Terns. We also had views of Little Pied, Pied, Spotted and King Shags on our way into Picton. The King Shag is an endemic that only breeds in and around Queen Charlotte Sound so it was really exciting to see these.

## 1 November 2022 – Day Eleven

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After breakfast it was down to the wharf for a safety briefing before departing for Blumine Island. The cruise up through the sound got us close to a pod of Dusky Dolphins that came right up to the boat to the delight of all aboard. Shortly after this we pulled into a cove where we had close views of both Spotted and King Shags and a brief view of a Reef Heron as it flew off. A Weka was waiting for us on the beach and was soon joined by another 2 as they made their way around the group looking for food. It didn't take long for the star of show, the Orange-fronted or Malherbe's Parakeet to show itself as 3 of them flew through the clearing and into some nearby bushes.



King Shags on Blumine Island. Dave Howes

Back in Picton, we picked up some lunch and started our trip south to Kaikoura, stopping briefly at a water treatment plant where Glossy Ibis have been known to breed. Either we were too early or they were out feeding elsewhere but we couldn't find one amongst the 80-odd Royal Spoonbills roosting in the Ngaio. There were however good numbers of Grey Teal, Australian Shoveler, Paradise Shelduck, Black Swan, Canada Geese and Mallard. We carried on our journey stopping at a lake a bit further south where we found our first Great Crested Grebe, which are interesting as they don't moult into basic plumage but remain in breeding plumage the whole year. The (usually) resident Hoary-headed Grebes didn't put in an appearance, but this could have been a result of the almost gale force winds we had.

After checking into our motel, we headed out to a great dinner at the Pier Hotel with it's stunning view over the bay on to the mountains behind. After dinner 3 of us went in search of Little Owl and in very little time found a rather grumpy looking individual sitting in a pine tree calling.

## 2 November 2022 – Day Twelve

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Today was possibly the most anticipated pelagic of the tour as Kaikoura is world renowned for it's seabird trips. Part of what makes it so special is that the continental shelf is not very far offshore creating all sorts of upwellings and meaning that you don't have to go too far to see birds and marine mammals.



Heading out full of expectation. Dave Howes.

Shortly after leaving the harbour, we had Little Penguins in the water and loads of Common Diving Petrels and Hutton's Shearwaters around. Our first chum spot wasn't far away and in true Kaikoura style, it wasn't long before we had Northern and Southern Giant Petrel, Cape Petrel, Westland Petrel and Sooty Shearwater around the boat as well Salvin's, Northern Royal and Black-browed Albatross.

A short move to another spot and not long after the chum went in the water, the birds arrived. The Giant and Cape Petrels showed up first, but were soon followed by White-capped, Salvin's, Northern Royal and our first Gibson's Wandering Albatross. We moved closer inshore where we had a great view of a Sperm Whale diving and a huge pod of Dusky Dolphins put on an awesome aerial display for us. And all this before lunch!



A stunning Cape Petrel glides past. Dave Howes

After lunch, some of the group opted for a walk over to South Bay, some to spend the afternoon relaxing and some of us did the pelagic trip all over again! No "new" birds were seen but it really is a privilege being on a pelagic trip in this amazing place. A dinner of fish and chips and a couple cold beers at the motel rounded out a fantastic day.

## 3 November 2022 – Day Thirteen

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After breakfast we departed for the west coast via an estuary where we saw our first Black Stilt. Normally confined to the McKenzie Basin, this black stilt has made this estuary home for a few years and this appears to have paired up with a Pied Stilt. Other interesting birds were Curlew Sandpiper, Pacific Golden Plover, Wrybill, Banded Dotterel and a Ruddy Turnstone as well as Black-billed Gulls and our first Black-fronted Terns. After an hour or so at the estuary we headed off for Arthurs Pass, stopping for lunch at the legendary Sheffield Pie Shop which certainly didn't disappoint with much debate afterwards as to what the best pie was!

As we approached Arthurs Pass, the weather started closing in and by the time we got to the village, it was raining. Luckily, we managed to find a flock of Kea quite close to town.



Black stilt with its pied mate. Andy Sims.

We made brief stops at the lookout points but in the wind and rain, we didn't stay long rather opting to head into Hokitika, check into the motel and have dinner.

## 4 November 2022 – Day Fourteen

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A stop at a lake outside Hokitika didn't yield the White Heron I expected, but did give us good views of Brown Creeper (Pipipi) and Tomtit. We carried on to Okarito where we spent some time exploring the wetland, beach and estuary. Again, we didn't have any luck finding the resident falcon but did have some success with Banded Dotterel, Variable Oystercatchers and Lesser Redpoll. Our main target bird here was the Okarito Brown Kiwi or Rowi, which is the rarest of the kiwi species.

After lunch we met up with our Kiwi guide who gave us a briefing for the night's kiwi walk, The news wasn't great as the birds had moved deep into the forest and it was probably going to be a round trip of at least 5 km's on steep muddy tracks in the rain! We went to check out the track before heading to Frans Josef and had a couple of Kea flying overhead as well as good views of Brown Creeper, Tomtit and South Island Robin.



Final briefing before searching for Rowi. Dave Howes.



After checking into our motel and having an early dinner, those of us that were going out for kiwi headed out to meet up with our guide. It was still quite light when we entered the forest and we had Kea flying overhead and good views of NZ Fantail, Brown Creeper, Tomtit and Grey Warbler. We walked for about 2.5km's and just before darkness fell, our guide gave us our final briefing on the do's and don'ts of kiwi spotting. We were divided into 2 groups of 3 and spread out along the track over quite a long distance. As it got darker, the Morepork started to call and before very long, my group had a male kiwi call in the bush probably less than 20m away! As we were in radio contact with the other group, we made contact and soon we were all lined up along the track full of anticipation. The bird then proceeded to come closer to us before we heard it moving off through dense bush in the opposite direction.

We relocated to another spot and had another bird moving in the bush close to the track. We listened and waited and waited and listened as we slowly moved up and down the track as the bird calmly but quite noisily went about its business frustratingly close to us but all the time out of sight. At one point 2 of us got a brief glimpse of something moving in the grass, which was most certainly our bird before it shot across the track to the other side and was only seen by our guide and 1 other. We called time on what had been an exciting, if frustrating night and headed back to the motel for a well-deserved sleep.

## 5 November 2022 – Day Fifteen

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A late start after a late night had us stopping to look at Franz Josef Glacier as the weather had cleared to give stunning views. Our southward journey had us stopping at a beach a bit further south to look for Fiordland Crested Penguins. The walk down to the beach yielded some typical and now familiar bush birds like Tomtit, Grey Warbler, Tui and Fantail, but once again we failed to find the pair of NZ Falcons known to live in the area – it was now very apparent that this was our bogey bird!

We sat quietly among the rocks on the beach and before long were lucky enough to get good, if quite distant views of 2 penguins coming up the beach. More bush birds on the walk back to the van and once at the carpark, still no falcon! Along the way to Wanaka we made a stop in some mature Podocarp forest and were rewarded with at least 6 Rifleman showing off for us as well as a handful of Tomtit, Grey Warbler and Bellbirds.



Not a bird – glacier watching!

Just outside Wanaka, we stopped at my “go to” spot in the whole country for falcon, where a pair has been known to breed over the last few years. A sign warning of the dangers of being dive-bombed by falcon and how to deal with this was encouraging, but despite spending at least an hour walking around the area, no falcon! By now it was getting late so we headed for the motel and then dinner.

## 6 November 2022 – Day Sixteen

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A fairly early start saw us back at the falcon spot. The local bird population was out in force, feeding on the ground and the surrounding trees and all looking quite relaxed about life, which we took as sign that the falcons probably weren't in the immediate area looking for breakfast. We spent some time searching anyway, but once again came up empty handed.

Our drive south took us over the Crown Ranges where we stopped at the lookout but unfortunately, the valley below was full of mist so the view was non-existent! A visit to Miles Better Pies in Te Anau had us stocking up for lunch before heading out towards Milford. The scenery along the way is spectacular and there is quite a lot to see along this road, but we didn't

have too much time so we pressed on to just past the summit where we got out and scrambled around among the boulder's at the base of a scree slope to look for Rock Wren. I heard one call and a minute later one of the group was on to it. A pair of birds appeared and in true Rock Star style, proceeded to entertain us for the next half an hour.



Rock Wren. Dave Howes.

Several stops on the way back to Te Anau got us more bush birds, Black-fronted Terns hawking over the paddocks and river along the way and great views of a Shining Cuckoo. We heard Long-tailed Cuckoo calling, but again couldn't find a falcon!

## 7 November 2022 – Day Seventeen

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Another early start as we headed to Bluff to get the ferry across to Stewart Island. The ferry crossing was quite tame by Foveaux Strait standards although the birding was fairly quiet.



South Island Robin, Ulva Island. Dave Howes.

Being on a fairly tight schedule, we dropped our bags at the hotel, collected packed lunches and boarded the water taxi to Ulva Island, which is another of New Zealand's predator-free sanctuaries. The weather wasn't great and the boat ride there was quite sporty and also very wet! We were greeted at the wharf by one of the many Weka on the island that sadly, have come to associate humans with food. We hadn't been on the trail long when we heard a flock of Yellowhead (Mohua) nearby and were soon watching a flock of these stunning birds feeding above us. We also had great views of Kaka, Red & Yellow-crowned Parakeets, South Island Robin, Brown Creeper, NZ Pigeon, South Island Saddleback and Rifleman. The ride back to Half Moon Bay was interesting as the weather had picked up but we got back safe and sound.

After dinner, a small group of us went out to see if we could find a Southern Brown Kiwi (Tokoeke) around the town. After an hour or so of walking around, we found a bird feeding right out in the open on a grass verge and spent some watching it before retiring to bed.

## 8 November 2022 – Day Eighteen

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After collecting our packed lunches, we boarded the boat for our final pelagic trip of the tour. Luckily the wind had dropped a bit overnight and a cruise of the inner Bay got us great views on Fiordland Crested Penguin and both Spotted and Foveaux Shags. A bit further out and we had some Little Penguins in the water, followed shortly by a group Yellow-eyed Penguins.



Fiordland Crested Penguin. Dave Howes.

A cruise around Bench Island gave us views of a female Hooker's Sealion and a Yellow-eyed Penguin on the rocks.

A bit further out at Flat Rock the local Brown Skuas came to the boat for their handouts and the aerial manoeuvrability of these birds is incredible to watch.

Our next stop was Wreck Reef where we stopped and set up a chum trail. In what seemed like no time at all, we had 70 plus NZ White-capped and a dozen or so Salvin's Albatross around the boat along with Southern Royal and Wandering Albatross and Cape Petrel. A flock of thousands of

Sooty Shearwater was never far away and there was a constant stream of Common Diving Petrels flying past. A Grey-backed Storm Petrel showed up in the slick followed shortly by a Wilson's Storm Petrel and we also had a visit from an Arctic Skua. I was soon time to leave and a stop at some rocks on the way home gave us excellent views of a breeding colony of Foveaux Shags.

After dinner we assembled to go out looking for Tokoeka. Our trip was organised through a local guide to an area with restricted access. It didn't take too long to find an adult which calmly carried on it's business, totally unfazed by our red light. After spending some time with the bird, we located another which we watched for a while before heading off for the night.

## 9 November 2022 – Day Nineteen

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The wind was certainly up for our return ferry crossing which made birding from the back deck very difficult and we didn't add any new birds to the list.

A brief stop at a lagoon in Invercargill in the howling wind, got us a bunch of waterfowl and then it was time to pick up some lunch and start our northward journey. A stop on the coast got us a Little Penguin and a Yellow-eyed Penguin as well as our first, rather distant views of Otago Shag.

From here we headed on to Oamaru, where we were to spend the night but not before heading down to the harbour to view the massive breeding colony of Otago Shags there. The Otago Shag was recently split from the Stewart Island Shag (now Foveaux Shag), although not all taxonomists have accepted the split.

## 10 November 2022 – Day Twenty

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After breakfast, we headed back inland as we made our way to the McKenzie Basin where our target was the Black Stilt. The recent rains had left a lot of the habitat flooded and although trying several spots, we failed to find any Black Stilts, although several Pied Stilts were seen.

At one of the spots we stopped we also had good scope views of an Australian Bittern, which was a surprise and a Baillon's Crake, our first for the trip. The clouds had lifted and on our way to Tekapo, we had stunning views on Aoraki Mt Cook and then, out of nowhere, a NZ Falcon flew over! Not everyone got to see it, so we quickly stopped and jumped out, but despite hanging around for a while, it never showed itself again.

The plan was to have lunch on top of Mt John while keeping an eye out for NZ Pipit, Chukor and falcon. Unfortunately, the gate was locked as the café was still opening limited hours so we had to make do with scoping the slopes from the road, where we managed to get onto a Chukor but none of our other targets.

We left Tekapo and made our way to Geraldine for our final dinner and night together as a group.

## 11 November 2022 – Day Twenty One

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An early departure saw us dropping most of the group at Christchurch airport at 9:00am for their long flight home. Rather than sitting in the airport for hours, the rest of us visited a local estuary where the semi-resident black stilt was very confident and allowed some great photo opportunities.

A quick stop at a local wetland got us several waterfowl and a Mute Swan after which it was back to the airport to farewell new friends.

We finished the trip on 146 species, 65 of which were endemics.

Thanks to Andy Sims for allowing me the use of his photos.

**Dave Howes**

**Wrybill Birding Tours, NZ Guide**