

# Tour report

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**29 October – 4 November 2025**

**7-day targeted tour with Wrybill Birding Tours, NZ**

**Led by Sav Saville, Wrybill Birding Tours, NZ**

## **Participants**

Simon Gawn & Rahat Ahmed

This was a short trip to score the few North Island species which Simon had missed on a previous trip many years before. Several normally productive sites were deliberately left out to maximise chances of the desired species.

Weather was good enough throughout. Cold to start with, but just a little rain on the first day, and warmer towards the end of the week.

## 29 October 2025 – Day One

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Pick-up in Auckland and south towards Turangi via Pureora. Targets for the day were NZ Falcon, Long-tailed Cuckoo, North Is Robin, Blue Duck and Fernbird.

The standard route around Pureora brought us tantalising heard-only records of two separate NZ Falcon before one (a male) was seen flying lazily above the forest. Plenty of Kaka, a very cooperative male Tomtit, several NI Robins and Whitehead kept us busy, but there was absolutely no sign of any cuckoos. Feeling that the weather wasn't particularly kind and knowing that we had another day tomorrow we set off for Turangi early afternoon.

Our first stop was a spot on a river near Turangi, and there they were – two adult Blue Duck just standing about showing off. Another was seen at a second spot nearby, so with that in the bag we tried for Fernbird. The Fernbirds were calling but determined not to show, so we called it a day.

## 30 October 2025 – Day Two

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To Taupo via Pureora. An early morning visit to a wetland didn't produce a sighting of Australasian Bittern, but two or more were heard booming. What we did get were very nice close views of Fernbird leaving only the cuckoo on our wanted list for the area.

It seemed like a long day of waiting, at several different sites in the general Pureora area, with dwindling thoughts of success as absolutely no cuckoo calls were heard. A NZ Falcon flying out of a stand of trees to stoop into a flock of finches was our highlight until the very last place on my list of cuckoo sites, when all of a sudden – Yes! That's the call! And then we had multiple calling Long-tailed Cuckoos around us (at least four birds) including one which was about eye-level and only metres away. When that bird eventually flew, it came right past us, maybe 5m off the ground and gave stunning views. Phew! We mopped up a few extra species for Rahat – Dunnock, Eastern Rosella and Yellowhammer and then made for Taupo and a (hot) Thai dinner.

## 31 October 2025 – Day Three

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To Miranda via Whitford. A Shore Plover that had absconded from its home in the Hauraki Gulf had been seen on a beach near Whitford, so that became our first target bird. The bonus was to be NZ Dotterel (Red-breasted Plover) that breed there. Also, the tide at Miranda wasn't until the afternoon anyway.

The Shore Plover didn't show, though we searched diligently. NZ Dotterels were present in good numbers and showed really well as a consolation.

Miranda was a little disappointing – although good numbers of Bar-tailed Godwit (5000?) and Red Knot (1000?) were present, there was little diversity. We struggled to find a handful of Wrybill, and about a dozen Pacific Golden Plover before de-camping to a separate site where we found 36 Wrybill strung out along the tide-line and allowing very close approach.

## 1 November 2025 – Day Four

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Day trip to Tiritiri Matangi Island. Targets : Stitchbird, North Island Saddleback, Brown Teal, Takahe.

The quick ferry ride from Gulf Harbour produced a few Australasian gannets and an Arctic Skua (Parasitic Jaeger) and then we were into the Tiritiri Matangi experience.

We took a long slow walk up towards the Lighthouse, and saw several Stitchbird, plenty of North Island Saddleback, Brown Quail, a few Red-crowned Parakeet, lots of Whitehead and heard a couple of Kokako.

A search around the Lighthouse did not produce any Takahe, so we tried a small pond for Brown Teal and got lucky with a pair and two well-grown ducklings. Back at the Visitor Centre for lunch a very obliging (unbanded) Kokako performed low down in full view.

Rahat wanted Rifleman as a "family tick" and so we spent a while looking, successfully, for them with 3 individuals seen well. Just the Takahe eluded us, despite multiple treks around the Lighthouse and accommodation areas.

## 2 November 2025 – Day Five

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Warkworth and environs. Targets: Takahe, Morepork, Northern Brown Kiwi.

Our original plan was to re-visit Tiritiri Matangi, but an alternate plan was to look for Takahe elsewhere and then (if successful) look for other stuff further up the coast.

So, first thing off to look for Takahe, with a bonus Laughing Kookaburra on road-side wires en route. Once in the park we staked out a position in a known hotspot. After maybe 10 minutes a Takahe came strolling

past, crossed the road and then proceeded along the length of a long grassy paddock giving us really great looks. NZ Pipit was seen at the same place.

With Takahe in the bag we went north to look for NZ Fairy Tern and duly found a couple at a local estuary. Rather distant views but NZ's rarest bird taxon so all good!

An early dinner and then we headed out for the main event. A (Buff-) Banded Rail was an appetizer on a lagoon, along with a couple more Brown Teal.

Walking into an area which Kiwi are known to frequent we soon heard a male and female Kiwi call – the first of many. Even before it was properly dark, and without torchlight a Northern Brown Kiwi ran across the trail ahead of us – close, but quick, almost certainly a male. More calls were heard mixed with the various calls of several Morepork, until a call near head height and seemingly quite close attracted our attention. Soon we were looking at a perched Morepork less than 10 m away – epic.

While walking out, a large female Kiwi ran towards us, realised her mistake and then quickly retreated. Another Kiwi was seen in the undergrowth, apparently feeding, but when the flashlight was put back on her she had silently disappeared into the bush. An altogether successful nighttime foray, with unfortunately brief views of Kiwi.

## 3 November 2025 – Day Six

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Marsden Cove pelagic.

A light easterly breeze, hardly the best direction, with some chop on the water – altogether quite pleasant conditions.

The standard Eastern Reef Egret stop produced four birds, and soon we were looking at Little Penguin right by the boat as the first Buller's, Fluttering and Flesh-footed Shearwaters swung past.

It turned out to be a somewhat strange day – not huge numbers, some unexpected species and some things distinctly “missing in action”. There were lots of Buller's Shearwater, lots of Fairy Prion, a whole load of Common Diving Petrel – but not a single contender for Pycroft's among the (only) 10 or so Cook's Petrels and no sign of a Black (Parkinson's) Petrel at all.

We did have good views of several Little Shearwater, quite a few White-faced Storm-petrel performed brilliantly and a single New Zealand Storm-petrel hung about for ages giving wonderful views. Many on board were very happy to have a Salvin's Albatross join us for a while and we also had a brief visit from a Buller's Albatross too. A couple of Mako Sharks provided some entertainment, though there were no cetacean sightings today.

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## 4 November 2025 – Day Seven

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Another go at Shore Plover. With none of our original target species available we decided to try again for the Shore Plover (which was seen the day after our previous attempt). En route to Whitford we had a brief stop to look for a vagrant Common Sandpiper – only a short detour and a new NZ bird for me, and for Wrybill Birding Tours.

The Shore Plover didn't show, again – and was not reported afterwards at all. Our last bit of birding before the airport was nearby, where the best birds were a group of three Brown Teal.

The trip ended with all terrestrial target species seen (except Shore Plover which was not expected), and the missed seabirds which we might reasonably have expected being Black and Pycroft's Petrel.

Trip total, including Australasian Bittern, as a heard only, was exactly 100 species.