

Tour report

31 October – 4 November 2025

5-day private tour with Wrybill Birding Tours, NZ



Led by Dave Howes, Wrybill Birding Tours, NZ

Participant

David Jones

Images

Dave Howes

This 5-day, private tour was organised and led by Wrybill Birding Tours, NZ. We were extremely lucky with the weather on our tour with a brief shower one evening, but no time lost because of it. The birds played their part too with us ending up with 94 species which included 2 “heard only” birds. The trip concentrated around Auckland, including one pelagic as Dave was being joined by his wife at the end of the tour and was then spending another two and a half weeks travelling south as far as Stewart Island

All in all, a great, albeit short, trip.

Dave Howes (Wrybill Birding Tours, NZ leader)



New Zealand Storm-petrel

31 October 2025 – Day One

Our five-day birding adventure began early in Auckland, where I met my guest, Dave, at around 7:30 a.m. From there we headed north toward Gulf Harbour to catch the ferry to Tiritiri Matangi Island. With some time to spare before departure, we stopped at a nearby park for a quick warm-up session — and it delivered straight away. We picked up a great mix of endemics, including Paradise Shelducks, Tui, Whiteheads, and an impressive flock of 26 Brown Teal (Pāteke), one of the biggest I've seen in that area.



Looking for penguins

We tore ourselves away from the birds and made our way down to the ferry terminal where after some cleaning and basic biosecurity checks we boarded the ferry to Tiri. With light winds, the crossing was fairly quiet from a birding point of view although we did have a rather unusual sighting in a flock of 7 Arctic Skuas sitting on the water with not a tern in sight – usually we'd see them harassing the White-fronted Terns into regurgitating their freshly caught fish.

After a briefing by the Department of Conservation ranger, we set off towards the bunkhouse with the first stop being a Stitchbird feeder which had lots of activity with Stitchbirds and Bellbirds coming and going to get to the sugar water.

We slowly made it up to the bunkhouse, stopping regularly for birds. The walk produced some fantastic viewing: Saddleback, Red-crowned Parakeet, Riflemen, and even a Kōkako on the way up — always a treat.

After a short stop at the bunkhouse for a safety briefing and lunch, we continued across the island, eventually tallying eight Kōkako for the day.

The afternoon gave us great views of New Zealand Pigeons, Tui, Bellbirds, Saddleback, Brown Quail, and later in the afternoon, once all the day-trippers had left, an appearance from the island's Takahē family. After dinner we headed down to the wharf, where — despite the cold wind — we watched 13 or 14 Little Penguins come ashore. Later, following a sheltered trail inland, we were rewarded with phenomenal views of a Little Spotted Kiwi only 15 minutes into our walk. We wrapped up a big day and were in bed by about 9:30 p.m.

1 November 2025 – Day Two

We woke early to Tiritiri's famous dawn chorus, enjoyed a quick breakfast, and set off to explore tracks we hadn't yet covered. The birding was steady and enjoyable, with more views of the island's key species, including Fernbird, Rifleman, and all the favourites from the day before. A major highlight was spotting a large male Tuatara basking at the entrance of his burrow — an unforgettable encounter with one of New Zealand's living fossils.



Tuatara

By early afternoon we'd made our way back to the wharf to catch the ferry. Once back on the mainland, we drove to Warkworth, checked into the motel, and enjoyed a great dinner at a local restaurant.

Afterward we headed to a nearby park for some evening birding. On the way we spotted a Laughing Kookaburra perched on power lines and although an introduced species, it's always good to catch up with

one of these. At the park we found another mix of endemics including our first Kākā, Brown Teal, Takahē, Paradise Shelducks, and more. Once it was dark, we searched for North Island Brown Kiwi, and were rewarded with excellent views of two very cooperative birds. Once again, we were back in bed by 9:30 p.m.

2 November 2025 – Day Three

The next morning, after breakfast, we headed further north. We stopped to look for Tomtit, and while several were calling, none came close enough to be seen. We did pick up species like Grey Gerygone, New Zealand Kingfisher, Fantail, and a few others before continuing to Mangawhai Harbour in search of the critically endangered Fairy Tern (Tara Iti).

Despite the low tide, we quickly found two Fairy Terns roosting on the sand and had excellent scope views. The harbour was busy with waders including Ruddy Turnstone, Bar-tailed Godwit, and others.



Shining Cuckoo

A few stops along the way produced a mix of waterfowl and Black, Little and Little Black Cormorants.

Further north at another estuary, we found two more Fairy Terns, and incredibly, we only noticed them when we were already quite close. They remained relaxed, allowing us superb views and photos. From there we visited a few more local spots, picking up Australasian Little Grebe and getting outstanding close views of a Shining Cuckoo perched right above us.

We wrapped up the day in Waipu, checked into our motel, and enjoyed another good dinner at the local Pizza Barn.

3 November 2025 – Day Four

The next morning, we left early, collected lunch, and drove to Marsden Cove Marina for our pelagic trip. With ten people on board including another Wrybill Birding Tours group, we headed out under good conditions. Near the harbour entrance we had a fantastic sighting of five Pacific Reef Herons, the most I've ever seen there. Shortly after clearing the heads, we found two Little Penguins resting on the surface, allowing close photography.



Little Penguins

At our first chum spot, activity slowly built with White-faced Storm Petrels, Flesh-footed Shearwaters, Fairy Prions, Cook's Petrels, and Common Diving Petrels. With no sign of our main target species, New Zealand Storm Petrel, we shifted locations — and it paid off. Before long, a single New Zealand Storm Petrel came right into the slick and fed behind the boat, giving excellent views. We were also visited by a Buller's Albatross, a Salvin's Albatross, and several more Cook's Petrels, although Pycroft's Petrel and Black Petrel eluded us.

We returned to Warkworth for another good meal and ended the day with a visit to a nearby park, where several Morepork were calling. We managed a good view of one gliding across a clearing.

4 November 2025 – Day Five

On our final morning, we headed south toward Auckland, stopping at a tidal mudflat where Shore Plover had recently been reported. While the plover didn't show itself, we had good views of Pied and Variable Oystercatchers, several New Zealand Dotterel, and other waders.

We spent a bit more time at a couple of nearby reserves and picked up familiar endemics including New Zealand Dabchick, Tui, and Fantail, before finally making our way to Auckland Airport, where I dropped Dave at his hotel.

It was the end of five fantastic days of birding, with superb weather, a long list of species, and excellent encounters — including kiwi, penguins, Fairy Tern, Tuatara, and a New Zealand Storm Petrel. A truly memorable North Island tour.