

Tour report

24 January – 13 February 2026

21-day tour with Wrybill Birding Tours, NZ



Lake Tekapo. Mathieu Poot.

Led by Mathieu Poot, Wrybill Birding Tours, NZ

Participants

David Larson, Mary Hansen, Vivian Woo, Karen Carpenter, Nerses Joubanian, Roxanne Etmekjian, Kathleen Rawdon, Nancy Phinney

Images

David Larson, Kathleen Rawdon, Nancy Phinney & Mathieu Poot

What a fantastic tour of New Zealand! We had a mix of everything along the way – a great bunch of people, some both good and terrible weather and some amazing birds.

The highlights of the trip are too many to list, but the Kiwi definitely spring to mind. Northern Brown, Little Spotted and Okarito all proved a challenge as we moved down the country. We had to work hard for all of them, but eventually saw all three. The Southern Brown Kiwi, who were much more accommodating and easier to find, provided us with great viewing opportunities right at the end. Searching for, and eventually finding, four different species of Penguins was another memorable part. The beautiful seabirds, a Long-tailed Cuckoo out in the open and Kea in the Mountains were other memorable moments.

The weather kept us on our toes – with heavy rain on a number of days, and crazy weather on several pelagics. Luckily this was contrasted by lots of beautiful sunny days. They say New Zealand gets four seasons in an hour and it definitely seemed like that on this trip!

We finished the trip on 153 species after driving 5,016 km. The Birds of the Trip were Buller's Albatross and Kea, with Erect-crested Penguin and Okarito Kiwi as runners up.

Thanks to everyone for joining the trip, and a special thanks to David for organising and for the amazing photographs.

Mathieu Poot (Wrybill Birding Tours, NZ Leader)

24 January 2026 – Day One

After meeting at our central Auckland hotel, we loaded the van and hit the road. Heading north, we passed through the central city, soon arriving at a beautiful patch of old-growth Kauri forest. The gusting wind wasn't in our favour, but we still added NZ Pigeon, Eastern Rosella and Sulphur-crested Cockatoo to the list. The local Pukeko (Australasian Swamphens) also put on a good show with lots of chasing and screeching.



Sulphur-crested Cockatoo. David Larson.

After a short drive, we arrived at our next stop - an Australasian Gannet colony. The wind had picked up considerably and was smashing into the West Coast, which is right where we were standing! Nonetheless, we enjoyed watching the Gannets flying around as well as the chicks on the nest. We also saw a Gray Noddy, a summer visitor to Northern New Zealand (NZ), but rare at this site.

Feeling a little peckish, we stopped in at our first bakery to try NZ's National dish - the pie! We loaded our lunch in the van and shot down the road to a lovely little beach, seeing NZ Dotterel and Paradise Shelducks while we enjoyed our lunch. A quick stop at the nearby Poo Ponds (Waste-water Treatment Plant) yielded NZ Scaup, Australasian Shovelers and NZ Grebes. Cathy also spotted our first Caspian Tern.

We continued onwards, stopping along the way to find Laughing Kookaburra at a local beach. Average views unfortunately, but with very heavy and increasing rain we opted to carry on to our next location - a predator-free park with regenerating native bush. We saw the cryptic Banded Rail by the entrance and then headed into the bush for a walk. It started slow, but a bird party soon passed through, causing chaos amongst the group. NZ Fantail, North Island (NI) Saddleback, Whitehead, Grey Gerygone and NI Robin all made a sudden appearance and cameras and binos were pointing in all directions! We added Brown Teal

further down the track, before finishing up our walk, heading to the motel, dinner and then off to bed. A fantastic first day and hopefully a sign of things to come!



The Team at the Gannet Colony. Mathieu Poot.



Grey Gerygone fledgling. David Larson.

25 January 2026 – Day Two

A short drive down the road had us at the local marina, ready for our first pelagic of the trip. We milled around the waterfront, seeing South Island Oystercatchers and a few Bar-tailed Godwits, before jumping on the boat and heading out into the Hauraki Gulf. The weather was decidedly average, but we bashed our way out to the outer Gulf and got to work on chumming. Flesh-footed shearwaters and Black Petrels soon surrounded the boat, with White-faced Storm-petrels in the slick and Cook's Petrels and Buller's Shearwaters passing through. After a while the call went up for NZ Storm-petrel, a major target for the day, as well as Pycroft's Petrel, with better views desired.



Cook's Petrel. David Larson.

With the weather getting even worse, and most of our targets in the bag, we made the call to head back inshore and check out a local Island. No doubt a great relief to several fallen soldiers that had succumbed to sea-sickness. We all grabbed a coffee and then headed off on a short walk, seeing Indian Peafowl, Weka and more Brown Teal. Then back in the boat and before long we were back on the mainland and headed back to the motel. A long, rough and amazing day.



NZ Storm-petrel. David Larson.



Weka. David Larson.



Brown Teal. David Larson.

26 January 2026 – Day Three

Aiming to meet the low tide, we were up early, in the van and headed north. Our first target for the day was the Fairy Tern, NZ's rarest native bird. We arrived at an estuary with the perfect tide, set up the scopes and started scanning. The harbour was full of life and Red Knot and Ruddy Turnstone were soon added to the list. Before long a distant small white bird came into view. The scopes swivelled around and there it was - Fairy Tern! A second bird soon joined it and we watched as they lapped the harbour, dip-feeding and landing on the sand. Outstanding stuff!

With our target in the bag we headed for a morning coffee (becoming a pattern already!), before heading to a nearby beach for a leisurely stroll. Boots were ditched and we hit the sand, looking at shells and Gulls, and adding NZ Pipit to the list. A small estuary at the end of the beach was uncharacteristically busy - the Department of Conservation (DOC) was releasing a group of Fairy Terns from the breeding programme later that morning. Auckland Zoo reps, the media and various others were all set up and waiting. Four Fairy Terns were also there, two adults and two juvies, evidently waiting to welcome the new arrivals!

After finishing our beach walk we continued north, stopping several times, before arriving at a Storm-water pond in the middle of a housing development. The description sounds pretty average, but the pond nonetheless put on the goods, with great views of Australasian Grebe, NZ Grebe and Pacific Black Duck.

Continuing north once again, we arrived at the motel and headed out for an early dinner, with our first round of Kiwi-spotting awaiting once it got dark!

Arriving at the Kiwi spot, we headed down into a forested valley, hearing multiple birds calling but struggling to get eyes on. After over an hour, we had an adult walk out onto the track in front of us, at the bottom of the valley. We were super stoked as we walked back, enjoying the stars and calling Kiwi as we went.

27 January 2026 – Day Four

Another early start had us heading back south, all ready for our second Pelagic. We briefly stopped on route, hoping for a Bittern, but it wasn't to be so we carried on. We arrived at the marina, grabbed our lunch for the day (plus coffee!) and then loaded onto our latest boat.

Conditions were glassy flat heading out, much nicer than last time, however it soon became apparent we had a different issue on our hands. The birds were sitting on the water, due to the lack of wind, and showed little interest in the chum or slick we had out the back. We spent some time amongst a large group of diving Gannets, with Short-beaked Common Dolphin feeding underneath.



Glassy Conditions. Mathieu Poot.

Throughout the day we saw Fluttering, Flesh-footed and Buller's Shearwater, White-faced and New Zealand Storm-petrels and Cook's Petrel.

We came in close to an Island to have lunch and watched Kaka and NZ Pigeons flying overhead. We had brief views of a few Red-crowned Parakeets and could hear NI Saddleback calling in the bush.

Still a lovely day on the water, including a brief Manta-ray swim by.

28 January 2026 – Day Five

We had another early start, this time heading to catch our ferry to Tiritiri Matangi Island. Tiritiri Matangi is a completely predator-free Island and is one of the crown jewels of the NZ conservation estate.

After arriving on the Island, we had our briefing and then headed out onto the walking tracks. The forest was alive with birds, and we soon found Red-crowned Parakeet, NI Saddleback, Stitchbird and had brief views of a Kokako. We slowly made our way up to the bunkhouse, enjoying friendly NI Robins and flocks of Whitehead overhead. We had lunch and spent some time relaxing at the bunkhouse, with naps for some and shopping for others, before heading out for our afternoon walk.

We saw similar forest species as the morning, with the addition of Brown Quail and Rifleman, and great views of several Kokako. On the way back, we found the resident pair of Takahe, along with their chick. With most of our targets found we headed back to the bunkhouse, cooked up a traditional Kiwi BBQ for dinner and then headed out for another round of Kiwi-spotting.



Takahe by the lighthouse. Mathieu Poot.

Little-spotted Kiwi was the target for tonight, we started with high hopes but after several hours of walking energy was fading fast. We arrived back at the bunkhouse and heard a Kiwi calling down the hill as we approached. Several opted to head to bed, while the rest of us headed in the direction of the calls. Finding nothing, and with the track petering out, we turned around to head back and there it was! A Little-spotted Kiwi walked out and paused on the edge of the track, a great reward to finish off a long day!

29 January 2026 – Day Six

Several of the team woke early to enjoy the dawn chorus. We headed down to a small pond, getting distracted by a clicking noise coming from dense scrub. A Fernbird, a notorious skulker, was hiding in the dense scrub and after a bit of patience we were rewarded with decent views. Arriving at the pond we could hear several Spotless Crakes calling and moving through the undergrowth. Brief views were had by several, but the birds stayed well hidden in the dense scrub.

Back at the bunkhouse we had breakfast and packed up, before heading back down to the wharf, enjoying the amazing birdlife once again. A short water taxi ride had us back on the mainland and we jumped in the van, grabbed lunch, and hit the road south.



Leaving the Bunkhouse. Mathieu Poot.

With tides better later that afternoon, we checked into our motel early and had several hours of rest and/or doing washing. Then headed for our afternoon birding spot, a top wader roost. On the way to the first hide we began seeing thousands of Bar-tailed Godwits, as well as hundreds of South Island Pied Oystercatchers, Red Knots and Wrybill. Pacific Golden Plover, Double-banded Plover and a single Sharp-tailed Sandpiper were also present.



Bar-tailed Godwit. David Larson.

After an hour at the first spot, we moved on to another hide, spending an hour there as well. Many of the same species were present as well as Ruddy Turnstone, Royal Spoonbill and several Black-billed Gulls. Then it was time for dinner and off to bed, ready for another big day tomorrow!



David Godwit spotting. Mathieu Poot.

30 January 2026 – Day Seven

We started the day with a quick stop at a local wetland. Several Wrybill and Sharp-tailed Sandpiper were present, as well as lots of general waterfowl.

Then it was time for a big drive south, arriving at a bakery just in time for lunch and a patch of forest not long afterwards. At our first stop, we had great views of Yellow-crowned Parakeet and flyovers from two NZ Falcon. Great birds to get early in the trip! We nipped around the corner, and went for a short walk amongst the massive podocarp trees. A little quiet on the bird front, but we all enjoyed the beautiful forest, as NZ Kaka flew loudly overhead. Our final stop in the forest was a canopy tower, providing great views out over the surrounding bush. Immediately upon arriving, we heard a Long-tailed Cuckoo calling – a major target for the day. We craned our necks upward, as several birds flew around out of sight, before one finally flew right overhead, calling all the while.

Another drive had us at a large river, on the hunt for Blue Ducks. We tried several spots but with the river quiet, we eventually called it and headed to the motel. All to play for tomorrow!



New Zealand Pigeon. David Larson.

31 January 2026 – Day Eight

With a very cryptic bird, comes a very early start! We were up before dawn and down to the local reedbeds, with our first target for the day being the Australasian Bittern. We crept along the edge of the reeds, with no sign by the time we reached the lakeshore. Little Black Cormorant and Eurasian Coot were added to the list, with thousands of Black Swans and hundreds of other Waterfowl filling the bay. We moved to a nearby embankment, seeing a few California Quails and more of the same waterfowl, but still no sign of the elusive Bittern. We were in the process of calling it quits when a large brown bird left the reedbed and began flying towards us, spotted by David. Harrier was the initial call, but that quickly changed as it came closer – Bittern! It landed in the reeds close by, providing great flight views as well as briefly climbing up a shrubby tree.

We continued on, to stop for a celebratory coffee next to the local river. While we sipped on our coffees, Matt nipped off towards the river for a quick scan and soon came running back full of excitement – Blue Duck! We piled into the van, shot down the road, piled back out of the van, and were soon enjoying our coffees with a said Duck feeding in the rapids in front us.

With our two morning targets secured, we headed back to the accommodation, had breakfast and once again loaded into the van, with a big drive taking us back to the East Coast. Brief stops for Fernbirds and Mute Swans kept us entertained along the way.

Next up was a saltwater marsh, holding Pacific Golden Plover, Double-banded Plover and Red-breasted Dotterel, but nothing new for the list. A nearby beach had several Black-fronted Dotterel, a striking little bird and our final new addition on a very productive day.



Coffees and Ducks. Mathieu Poot.

1 February 2026 – Day Nine

Another morning, another wetland. We enjoyed watching several feeding Royal Spoonbill as well as Gulls and Cormorants, but after trying our best, and hearing several individuals, could not connect with our targeted Spotless Crake. We stopped in again at yesterday's marsh, hoping for a Red-necked Stint, but had no luck so jumped in the van for another big drive.

A morning stroll around a stunning reedbed provided great views of New Zealand Grebe and general waterfowl. We heard Spotless Crake once again, but like earlier in the morning they were not keen to show.

After arriving on the West Coast, we checked in and took some time to relax. A quick stop down at the local estuary yielded a few distant shorebirds, but with a poor tide and rain coming down, we called it quits and headed off to dinner.



Royal Spoonbill. David Larson.

2 February 2026 – Day Ten

We awoke with an exciting travel day ahead – we were leaving the North Island and heading to the South on a big Ferry – with some good seabird potential during the crossing.

We stopped in at a local lagoon, seeing a great diversity of waterfowl including Paradise Shelduck, Australasian Shoveler, Grey Teal, NZ Scaup and some (very domesticated) Greylag Geese. A lone NZ Grebe was cruising around the pond, and three species of Cormorant roosted in the trees nearby. We carried on down the road and took a walk around a sandspit, seeing Variable Oystercatchers, Red-breasted Dotterels with chicks and Caspian Terns.

We reached Wellington, drove onto the Ferry and after a quick lunch stop, headed out on deck. The birding was slow but consistent, and the conditions very windy. We picked up Fluttering, Hutton's, Sooty, Flesh-footed and Buller's Shearwaters as well as Fairy Prions, and eventually – White-capped Albatross! Our first Albatross for the trip, so we were very content as we left the open sea section and headed into the Marlborough Sounds.



NZ Grebe. David Larson.



Red-breasted Dotterel. David Larson.



The Crew out on deck. Mathieu Poot.



White-capped Albatross on a windy Cook Strait. David Larson.

As we sailed up the beautiful, forested Sounds we saw Australasian Gannets and White-fronted Terns, with a few Parasitic Jaegers chasing the latter. Further up the Sound we added Spotted Shags to our list, before disembarking and checking into our hotel for the night.



Parasitic Jaeger chasing a White-fronted Tern. David Larson.

3 February 2026 – Day Eleven

We awoke to rain and wind – far from ideal conditions to tour the Sounds. After heading out, we soon saw some Little Blue Penguins and Fluttering Shearwaters, before we found our first big target for the day: King Shags! This species is the rarest cormorant in the world, with only 6-700 individuals.

We stopped over at an island, climbing off the boat in pouring rain in pursuit of our next special bird – the Orange-fronted Parakeet. We watched several Weka rummaging around as well as plenty of Bellbirds, and heard a South Island Saddleback. With the rain only increasing, we went for a walk, eventually getting a couple of average Parakeet flyovers, seen by some. A showy pair of Rifleman was a nice surprise before we clambered back onto the boat and headed for shore, stopping at a Spotted Shag roost along the way.



King Shags. David Larson.



Searching in the rain. Mathieu Poot.

Back in the van and headed south, we stopped in at the local Poo-ponds, spotting an abundance of waterfowl but nothing new for the list. Next up was a small lake, with great views of Australasian Shoveler and Eurasian Coot. After lots of running around and waiting in the rain, we saw several Hoary-headed Grebe, a highly localised new native, originally from Australia. Our final stop was an overlook of a NZ Fur Seal Colony to finish up a wet and wild day.

4 February 2026 – Day Twelve

With the worst of the weather seemingly behind us, we headed out onto the water for our next pelagic. We soon had massive NZ Wandering Albatrosses surrounding the boat, as well as one each of Northern and Southern Royal Albatross. White-capped and Salvin's Albatross soon joined the party as well. The smaller birds were also putting up a good show, with Pintado, White-chinned and Westland Petrels, as well as Flesh-footed, Buller's and Hutton's Shearwater all in attendance. A group of Northern Giant Petrels were snapping and chasing each other around and as we were leaving the spot, we noticed a Southern Giant Petrel amongst them. The next spot had more of the same with the addition of a brief pass from a Black-browed Albatross. Heading back in, the local Dusky Dolphins put on a show, and we had a brief appearance from Hector's Dolphins as well.



Northern Royal Albatross. David Larson.



Southern Royal Albatross. David Larson.



Southern Giant Petrel. David Larson.



White-faced Storm Petrel. David Larson.



Little Owl. David Larson.

For the afternoon, the group split up, with a number going out on an afternoon pelagic, some heading out Whale-watching and some staying ashore for a little retail therapy. The birders saw many of the same species, as well as White-faced Storm-petrels, and the Whalers saw Humpback and Sperm Whales.

That afternoon we had a traditional Kiwi dinner of fish and chips, before heading out Owling, soon finding two of our target Little Owls.

5 February 2026 – Day Thirteen

Our first area to explore for the morning was a large estuary. We stopped in some nearby paddocks and scoped a Cape Barren Goose, before heading out into the mud for a walk. Plenty of wading birds were out on the mud, such as Double-banded Plover and Red Knot, and we had several striking Black-fronted Terns fly by. A long-staying vagrant Little Egret capped off the location, and we headed back to the van along a lovely beach.

A quick stop in at a local golf-course followed, looking unsuccessfully for an Australian Wood Duck, before we turned west and headed for the mountains.

We checked out a local café, encountering a cheeky Kea and a family of Rifleman before carrying on through to the West Coast and checking in for the night.

6 February 2026 – Day Fourteen

After a relaxed morning of shopping we hit the road, travelling through stunning old growth forest, before arriving at a Lagoon. We had our lunch on the water's edge then went and got our briefing for Kiwi-spotting later that evening. A quick post-briefing stop on the nearby beach yielded a long-range Great Egret.

On the road out from the Lagoon, we stopped for a short forest walk in the drizzling rain. Curious South Island Robins and Tomtit surrounded us and before long we spotted a few Pipipi. At the top the hill we found Yellow-crowned Parakeet, as well as great views of Fernbird back in the carpark.

We headed into the nearby town to check in and have a nice early dinner. Then we geared up and headed back to the forest to meet up with our Kiwi-guide Ian. After a little bit of training, we headed to a likely spot in the territory of an Okarito Kiwi pair, and began to wait. After an hour or so we heard the pair call deep in the forest – they had gone in the opposite direction from us! We moved on to plan B to try for another pair and soon heard them calling down the track. After sneaking forward we were rewarded with brief views of a subadult, as well as several views of a young chick. Another Kiwi feeding on the road on the way out was a perfect way to end the night.



Yellow-crowned Parakeet. David Larson.



Fernbird. David Larson.

7 February 2026 – Day Fifteen

Another day, another big drive. We grabbed some fuel and lunch and headed south, once again winding through beautiful old growth forest. The drive was stunning and we enjoyed the scenery, stopping several times to enjoy the views.

Our first big stop was at a forest carpark next to a river. We made our way down into the riverbed and spent an hour or two relaxing. We ate lunch as we watched NZ Pigeons fly overhead, with Tomtits and Grey Gerygones flitting amongst the branches. After some time, we noticed two New Zealand Falcon circling high in the sky. Very distant views but great to see nonetheless.

We carried on driving, crossing over the Southern Alps before dropping down into a beautiful lakeside town. Down on the foreshore we had great views of Great Crested Grebes. Multiple pairs were swimming around, and we saw several nests with eggs and chicks nearby.



Great Crested Grebe pair. Kathleen Rawdon.

8 February 2026 – Day Sixteen

Today we were heading into New Zealand's biggest National Park – Fiordland. The scenery turned it up a notch once again as we headed up into the mountains, travelling through beautiful beech forest and along pristine lakes. We wound down into Milford Sound to enjoy one of New Zealand's most famous vistas with our lunch. A Great Egret was feeding in the bay, while the Tui, Bellbird and other forest species kept up a nice chorus.

We started out on a hike up a mountain valley, climbing through boulder fields. The track was more difficult than we'd hoped, so we stopped after some distance for a rest before we turned around. A calling Long-tailed Cuckoo caught our attention, and it soon flew in and perched on an open branch nearby. Exceptional views of a generally shy and elusive bird.



Long-tailed Cuckoo. Mathieu Poot.

Our final stop for the day was a beautiful, mirrored lake. Several NZ Scaup were paddling around, but the highlight was lots of Riflemen giving extended close views.



The Crew in the Mountains. Mathieu Poot.

9 February 2026 – Day Seventeen

We were up early and down the road at a small pond, on the hunt for Baillon's Crake. We heard several calling and after some patience, they showed themselves, darting back and forth between the rushes.

Carrying on south, we reached Bluff, New Zealand's Southernmost town. The van was dropped off and we boarded our Ferry, ready to cross the Foveaux Strait, and hopefully spot a few birds along the way! White-fronted and Black-fronted Terns were feeding in the harbour entrance, and we saw White-capped Albatross, Little Blue Penguins, Common Diving-petrel, Sooty Shearwater and Foveaux Shags as we crossed.

We checked into our accommodation, had lunch, and were back on the water, this time in a water-taxi headed for a predator-free Island. On the way out we looked for Fiordland Crested Penguins, to no avail, before arriving at the island and going for a walk. We saw Kaka, Bellbirds, Tui, NZ Pigeons and noisy South Island Robins. Before long we found a noisy flock of Yellowheads, and in amongst them – a young South Island Saddleback!



South Island Robin. David Larson.

Back on the mainland we had dinner before heading out for our final night of Kiwi-spotting. We started walking and soon located first one, then a second Southern Brown Kiwi in the red-light. Amazing to see both birds interacting and get such a closeup experience. With the birds in the bag, we called it a night and headed home, seeing a further two birds on the short drive!

10 February 2026 – Day Eighteen

With much excitement we boarded the boat for our final pelagic. Heading out into the bay, we tried our luck again for Fiordland Crested Penguins, and soon found several sitting on the rocks! Little Blue Penguins were next and following that, several Brown Skua making close passes over the boat. We started seeing lots of White-capped Albatross and Sooty Shearwater as we steamed out, along with the occasional Common Diving-petrel, Southern Royal Albatross and Fairy Prion to spice things up.



Brown Skua. David Larson.



Southern Royal Albatross. David Larson.



Buller's Albatross. Nancy Phinney.

Arriving at the chumming spot the Albatrosses came in thick and fast, with Buller's and Salvin's Albatross joining the party. The smaller birds also put up a good showing, with Pintado Petrel and Short-tailed Shearwater present throughout, as well as three species of Storm-petrel! Wilson's, White-faced and Grey-backed Storm-petrel all showed well, awesome to see the three of them side-by-side. A Northern Giant, White-chinned and Mottled Petrel all appeared briefly, late in the day.

We saw a large colony of Foveaux Shags on the way back in, before heading ashore for some R&R and dinner.

11 February 2026 – Day Nineteen

On to the ferry once again, it was a bumpier ride back to the mainland. The birding was quiet but consistent, with a few White-capped Albatross, Cook's Petrel, Sooty Shearwater and Common Diving-petrel to keep us interested.

We grabbed the van and hit the road, with another big drive ahead of us. With a lunch stop along the way, we arrived at our next spot in the early afternoon. A rocky peninsula, home to a number of Yellow-eyed Penguins. We set ourselves up and began to wait... for the next three hours, but nothing showed up. A

Little Blue Penguin moulting in a Rabbit hole was a nice consolation prize before we called it for the night and carried on towards our accommodation.

A lovely meal and trip quiz was a great way to end the day.

12 February 2026 – Day Twenty

We woke up before dawn and headed for a stakeout along a beach. We waited on the cliffs above as it got light, our last chance to see Yellow-eyed Penguins. Before long one came waddling out of the bushes, pausing momentarily for great scope views, before jumping into the water and heading out to sea. Great success! Another followed, as well as two seen in the bushes, and we spotted a different Penguin down the beach. On closer inspection – a juvenile Erect-crested Penguin hiding amongst the rocks!

We visited an old wharf, home to an impressive colony of several thousand Otago Shags. Then it was back to the hotel, breakfast and on the road, heading inland once again.

We stopped at a Famous pie shop for lunch, which we agreed was the best of the trip, before arriving in our area of operation, a picturesque lake surrounded by the mountains. Our target bird was the Black Stilt, the world's rarest wading bird, and after some searching, we spotted a few distant birds. We got them in the scope before making our way down onto the mudflats, eventually counting nine of these amazing birds.



On the hunt for Black Stilts. Mathieu Poot.

Carrying on towards the motel, we stopped at several scenic viewpoints, as well as a nice Salmon Farm. Then we checked in and went for a team debrief; getting quiz results, deciding Bird of the Trip and enjoying a general talk about our experiences. Then it was beautiful dinner and off to bed.

13 February 2026 – Day Twenty-One

A leisurely start this morning, we loaded into the van for the final time and pointed east. Our main stop along the way was a large hill with a resident population of introduced Chukar. We drove slowly up, checked out the view at the top and back down again, not to be today.

We started our journey to the airport, with a final stop at our now favourite pie place along the way. We said our goodbyes at the airport and went our separate ways. Hard to believe our tour had come to an end. Some great birds, lots of laughs and an awesome group of people!



The team on the Crown Range. Mathieu Poot.