

# Tour report

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3 to 23 February 2026

**21-day tour with Wrybill Birding Tours, NZ**



Morepork. Willi Kwek.

**Led by Bradley Shields, Wrybill Birding Tours, NZ**

## **Participants**

Kris Hansen, Willi Kwek, Stefan Johansson, Simon & Johanna Walkley, Dan & Lauri Doucette, Lysbeth Muirhead

## **Images**

Willi Kwek, Lauri & Dan Doucette and Bradley Shields

## 3 February 2026 – Day One

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Our tour began with a stop at a forested area, where we had great looks at our first endemic birds of the trip. Tui, New Zealand fantail, grey warbler and New Zealand pigeon all gave us great views while a few sulphur-crested cockatoos flew over. Next, to a local gannet colony where we were treated to a spectacle of hundreds of Australasian gannets flying around and feeding young. We spent the next few hours focusing on fairy tern, one of the rarest birds in the country with only around 40 birds. Patience finally paid off as we were treated to extended views of a couple of birds feeding on the mudflats.

After driving a bit more we made a quick stop to look at some New Zealand dabchick, New Zealand scaup and Australasian little grebe.

After checking into our accommodation we found a sleeping Morepork in a nearby tree.



Morepork. Willi Kwek.

After we wrapped up dinner we headed out for our first kiwi of the trip, the Northern brown kiwi. We spent a couple hours wandering around in the dark, in which time we managed to see 4 kiwi!

## 4 February 2026 – Day Two

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After some much needed sleep, we headed south to head out for our first pelagic of the trip. We steamed out to the open ocean picking out a few Pacific reef herons along the way. Once out in some deeper water we had some great feeding workups of Australasian gannets and Fluttering, Flesh footed, Buller's and little shearwaters. Further out again and we started to pick up a few white-faced storm petrels, black petrels and Cook's petrels. After a while of carefully observing passing Cook's petrels, we were able to pick out a few very similar Pycroft's petrel, a great bird for the list and not an easy one to identify.



White-faced storm-petrel. Laurie Doucette.

## 5 February 2026 – Day Three

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After a bumper first two days we had a more chilled day exploring the beaches and forests of a pest free sanctuary. Along the beaches we had some great looks at New Zealand dotterel and NZ pipit while in the shade of the forest we had our first crack at some nice endemic bush birds. These included great looks at New Zealand Bellbird, tui, North Island Robin, whitehead, and kaka. While in the area we also found a few pairs of brown teal, a couple of sacred kingfisher and some brilliant views of five South Island takahe.



New Zealand pipit. Dan Doucette.

## 6 February 2026 – Day Four

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Our day began with a quick stop at a mangrove estuary where we quickly found a banded rail skulking around. We then went off to our main activity of the day, another pelagic seabird trip. As we were leaving the harbour we quickly picked up our first little blue penguins and got great looks as we cruised past them sitting in the water. Once we were further out we started to see a few shearwater species like fluttering, Buller's and flesh-footed as well as a couple of white-faced storm-petrels. While at our chum spot, we picked up a few more of these birds plus some really great numbers of Cook's petrel coming through. Much to our delight a couple of New Zealand storm-petrels made an appearance doing several close laps around the boat!



New Zealand storm-petrel. Dan Doucette.

We steamed over to a nearby predator free island where we parked up offshore to listen to the amazing birdsong. Here we heard North Island robin and North Island saddleback as well as several long tailed cuckoo!

## 7 February 2026 – Day Five

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We took off bright and early and made our way to a ferry which took us to predator free Tiritiri Matangi Island. This open sanctuary would be our home for the night so we had the full day to explore and look for its special endemic species. It didn't take us long to start seeing some amazing birds, starting with great looks at Stitchbird, NZ bellbird, red crowned parakeet and whitehead. A little ways along the track we picked up a few North Island saddleback and our first North Island kokako which showed amazingly well. Through the rest of the day we found a couple more kokako pairs that performed well for all and a couple of New Zealand's smallest birds, the rifleman, as well as a secretive spotless crane.

After a nice BBQ dinner at the bunkhouse we went for a sunset stroll finding a very obliging South Island takahe family. As it got dark, we got prepared to go on a kiwi walk. We set off quietly walking along the track in the dark when a shape appeared in the red light, not a kiwi but a tuatara! An ancient reptile that has been around for millions of years! While admiring this prehistoric creature a little spotted kiwi jumped out onto the track just behind it and gave everyone great looks. We stayed out a little bit longer managing to find one more little spotted kiwi, lots of little blue penguins, several tuatara, giant weta and even a Duvaucel's gecko! What a night!



Stitchbird. Dan Doucette.



North Island kokako. Dan Doucette.

## 8 February 2026 – Day Six

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After an eventful day and night on Tiritiri Matangi we packed up and headed down to the wharf. On the way we had lots of amazing looks at North Island saddleback with several family groups feeding beside the track.

Once back on the mainland we headed south to an impressive wader roost where we found thousands of bar-tailed godwit and South Island pied oystercatcher. Scattered among them were lots of Wrybill, Banded dotterel, red knot and Pied stilt. We had a few rarer Arctic waders as well including some Pacific golden plover and a couple of sharp-tailed sandpiper. Down the road a bit we found a couple more sharp-tailed sandpiper and some vagrant glossy ibis. We continued a bit further to have a look for a far eastern curlew that had been hanging around at a South Island oystercatcher roost. Sure enough, we found it straight away and spent a while admiring this stunning bird as it fed.



North Island saddleback. Dan Doucette.



Wrybill. Dan Doucette.

## 9 February 2026 – Day Seven

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We hit the road early to make it to our first destination before the heat of the day kicked in.

Upon arrival at this predator controlled piece of forest we were greeted by lots of yellow-crowned parakeets flying overhead, along with a couple of kaka. Back at the carpark we had a lovely male North Island tomtit flitting around the trees.

After a bit more of a drive we stopped at a wetland area where we added little black shag, Australasian shoveler, and Eurasian coot to the list, as well as some nice New Zealand dabchicks. After checking in to the accommodation we went out to the river for one last birding stop of the day. After a bit of searching we found a pair of stunning Blue duck with a juvenile. They sat and preened on the edge of the river providing great views for all. A great way to finish the day.



Blue duck. Willi Kwek.

## 10 February 2026 – Day Eight

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We left early to head to a nearby wetland in hope of seeing an Australasian bittern. After a bit of searching we eventually saw a bird fly past over the reeds, a great bird! After a decent drive we had some lunch in a

lovely patch of forest. Here we went for a good walk enjoying the forest but it was unfortunately a little bit quiet on the bird front with fleeting views of North Island robin and a couple of rifleman and tomtit heard calling. We left the forest and headed to the coast where we hit a couple local estuaries. Here we had great views of a lone Pacific golden plover and a couple of tiny black-fronted dotterel. A local park was next on the list, here we had great looks of more NZ dabchick and nesting little black shags. The main attractions were some nice close black-billed gulls and some nesting Royal spoonbills.



New Zealand (grebe) dabchick. Dan Doucette.

## 11 February 2026 – Day Nine

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We began the day with a drive up to a lovely scenic lookout where we had great views of the surrounding region and a New Zealand pipit. We began driving south, stopping at another wetland where we had great looks of Black swan and more New Zealand dabchicks. We reached the accommodation early and decided to go for a bit more of a drive to look for Nankeen night herons. We arrived at the location and quickly found an adult sitting in a tree and, even a couple of juveniles sitting in a nest!



Nankeen night heron. Lauri Doucette.

Next stop was another coastal estuary where we had some nice close wrybill, some more close Pacific golden plover and some lovely breeding plumage bar-tailed godwits.

## 12 February 2026 – Day Ten

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Our last day in the North Island began with a bit of a drive south, followed by a good look around a rivermouth where there was a large group of white-fronted terns. Amongst them we managed to pick out a common tern, a very similar looking species, but very rare in this part of the World. We then headed straight to catch the ferry to the South Island. Along the way through the Cook Strait we saw our first white-capped albatross and Arctic skua. A great bonus was a nice pod of short-beaked common dolphins zooming along beside the ship. Once in the sheltered Marlborough Sounds we even had a couple of New Zealand King shags!



Short-beaked common dolphins. Dan Doucette.

## 13 February 2026 – Day Eleven

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Our first day on the South Island began with an awesome cruise on Queen Charlotte Sound, where we had amazing views of roosting New Zealand king shags and spotted shags. While on the open water we came across some rafts of fluttering shearwater and a little blue penguin. We even had a fairy prion quickly zoom past the boat! A surprising species to see this close to shore! We continued to a predator free island seeing a few Arctic skua and some Hector's dolphins along the way.

Once on the island we were greeted by several New Zealand pigeons and Weka. After a little bit of searching, a couple of orange-fronted parakeets flew past giving us a quick view. A little bit more walking around and we found a shining cuckoo and a juvenile South Island saddleback feeding close within the bushes. As we got back to the Mainland we picked up some lunch and made our way to some open country farmland where we managed to find a pair of cirl bunting, an introduced songbird but a scarce and lovely bird at that. We checked out a lake where we found a few resident hoary-headed grebe and some New Zealand scaup.



Little penguin. Lauri Doucette.

The next stop was a coastal fur seal colony where we saw hundreds of New Zealand fur seals including lots of young pups. After checking into the accommodation and having dinner we made a quick stop where we found a little owl. Another introduced bird but a lovely owl and a great addition to the trip list.

## 14 February 2026 – Day Twelve

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We boarded our charter boat and steamed out to some deep water for our first South Island Pelagic. At the chum spot we had great looks at New Zealand wandering albatross (Gibson's subsp) coming right into the boat as well as Salvin's albatross and a couple of Northern Royal albatross. We also had great numbers of Cape petrels and Northern giant petrels. We had a brief appearance of a white chinned petrel and a few close flybys of Hutton's shearwater, before heading into shore.



Albatross off Kaikoura. Bradley Shields.



Salvin's albatross. Dan Doucette.

## 15 February 2026 – Day Thirteen

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After a decent drive south in the morning we arrived at an estuary near Christchurch. Here we had a good look around for some waders and terns. We were treated to some lovely views of black-fronted tern and pied stilts. We even had a vagrant little egret hiding amongst the driftwood. We headed inland and grabbed some lunch before heading up into the mountains for our next target bird. It didn't take us long to find several cheeky kea flying around causing mischief at the local cafe. After taking lots of photos and spending a good chunk of time hanging out with these beautiful birds, we descended down to the West Coast of the South Island. Before calling it a day we made one last stop on the off chance we might find a blue duck. We were rewarded with incredible close views of a pair of blue duck feeding in a small forest stream allowing everyone to get great photos. On the way out a small pond yielded a couple of lovely pure-looking Pacific black duck.



Kea. Lauri Doucette.

## 16 February 2026 – Day Fourteen

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We drove south to a large patch of forest where introduced predators have been almost entirely removed and the birdlife is thriving. Within minutes of getting out of the car we already had several South Island robins hopping around our feet as well as a couple of groups of brown creeper. There was lots of other bird activity around with lots of South Island tomtit, New Zealand bellbird, tui, silvereye, grey warbler and a few yellow-crowned parakeets.



Brown creeper (pipipi). Dan Doucette.

Our next stop was a small coastal wetland where we found a couple of fernbirds before we headed off to our accommodation. After dinner we drove out to a nearby property in hopes of finding a New Zealand falcon. It didn't take us too long before we saw one perched in a tree in the golden evening light. From here we drove out to meet our kiwi guide Ian. At dusk we walked through some beautiful West Coast rainforest and listened to several calling morepork as we waited for a pair of kiwi to come out. After a close miss with one pair of kiwi we quickly relocated to another area where we quickly found an Okarito Brown Kiwi! We spent a bit longer out there and managed to find another two birds including a small chick!



South Island robin. Dan Doucette.



Fernbird. Dan Doucette.

## 17 February 2026 – Day Fifteen

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After an action packed night kiwi spotting, we returned to the abundant forest we'd visited the day prior, once again greeted by lots of robins and this time also a super cooperative fernbird that showed exceptionally well for all. We headed further south stopping at a carpark area for lunch where we had another New Zealand falcon make an appearance. We continued travelling making a quick stop at some more forest where we found a few nice riflemen.

Our last stop of the day before getting to the accommodation was a large deepwater lake where we had lots of close and photogenic great crested grebes.

## 18 February 2026 – Day Sixteen

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We left early heading south to Fiordland National Park, where a few intrepid members of the group set off to look for rock wren, while the others stayed at the carpark area looking for more kea and tomtits. After a bit of a walk around in the alpine boulder fields we managed to find a pair of rock wren near a waterfall, they showed exceptionally well bobbing up and down on the rocks calling to each other at close range giving us great photo opportunities. On the way back we had a brief flyover of a long-tailed cuckoo that was seen well.



Rock wren. Dan Doucette.

Next we headed to the famous Milford Sound where we had incredible views of the fiords and towering mountains. On the way back we made a quick stop beside the road where we had a kea come in close and inspect our vehicle! A few short minutes later the rain began to settle in and we headed to our accommodation for the night.

## 19 February 2026 – Day Seventeen

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Another early start as we made our way to the bottom of the South Island where we caught the ferry to Stewart island. Along the ferry crossing we had numerous sooty shearwater and white-capped albatross. It wasn't long after we arrived on the island, that we were quickly off again on another boat to the predator free Ulva Island. On the way we had our great looks at Buller's albatross and even a couple of Fiordland crested penguins! We spent the next few hours walking around the predator free island where we had amazing looks at our main target bird, the yellowhead! We also enjoyed good looks at rifleman, brown creeper, South Island robin, red-crowned parakeet, weka and kaka. Just before returning to Stewart Island we had a South Island saddleback show for a couple minutes.



Kaka. Dan Doucette.



Fiordland crested penguin. Lauri Doucette.



Yellowhead. Dan Doucette.

After dinner we went out for our fourth and final kiwi species of the tour. It didn't take long once we started looking to see our first southern brown kiwi! Within an hour we had seen three at incredibly close range feeding in the open!

## 20 February 2026 – Day Eighteen

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We boarded our boat for our full day pelagic off Stewart Island, first visiting a Fiordland crested penguin moulting site where we had some good views of birds on the rocks and in caves. Next was a small island in search of brown skua, Foveaux (Stewart Island) shag and yellow-eyed penguins. We had great views of brown skua and Foveaux shag as they flew around the boat but no luck on a yellow-eyed penguin.

We headed out to our chum spot where we were surrounded by thousands of seabirds. Including 100s of white-capped albatross, with several Southern Royal, Salvin's and Buller's albatross mixed in. There were thousands of sooty shearwater zooming all around making for a real spectacle. We had good appearances of smaller seabirds with several Cook's, Cape, common-diving and white-faced storm petrel, plus a few fairy prions. Just before we left to head back to shore we had a welcome appearance from a tiny grey-backed storm petrel that showed well for all.



Buller's albatross. Lauri Doucette.



Sooty shearwater. Dan Doucette.

## 21 February 2026 – Day Nineteen

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We left Stewart Island, back across on the ferry thankfully seeing a few mottled petrels along the way. Once back in the van we headed north to try another sport for the yellow-eyed penguin we missed on Stewart Island. We arrived at the beach and thankfully after only waiting for 15 minutes a yellow-eyed penguin came in from the ocean, walked up the beach, sat and preened for 5 minutes and then waddled off into the scrub. We all got great views of this very rare and beautiful bird. With the pressure off for that bird we set our sights on another vagrant penguin that had been hanging around nearby. With some local knowledge we went for a bit of a walk to try our luck. Half an hour later and we were looking right at a beautiful erect-crested penguin nearing the end of its moult!

A quick stop before checking in gave us great views of a large Otago (Stewart Island) shag colony with lots of spotted shags around too.

## 22 February 2026 – Day Twenty

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We set off on our last full day of the tour with our sights set on black stilt, one of the rarest wading birds on the planet. After a mandatory stop to grab a salmon and bacon pie, we continued to our destination and before we even left the car we had a pair of black stilts in sight! After we had some good, although not close, looks at them we left to go try our luck at finding some closer birds. Along the way we made a couple scenic stops to admire the breathtaking landscape of the Southern Alps including the highest mountain in New Zealand, Aoraki-Mount Cook. At the next stop we quickly found five black stilts feeding really close, giving us incredible views and plenty of great photo opportunities.



Black stilt. Dan Doucette.

## 23 February 2026 – Day Twenty-One

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As we set off for the long drive to the Christchurch Airport, we had one last stop up the top of a hill to look for a chukar, an introduced partridge from Eurasia. Unfortunately we didn't have much luck but we were rewarded with yet again brilliant views of the surrounding landscape. On the drive to the airport we all

reminisced on the highlights of the trip (of which there were too many to count!) and commented on the beauty that is New Zealand.

What a truly epic tour!



A happy team!