



NEW ZEALAND BIRDING ADVENTURE

2 – 19 FEBRUARY 2019



Kea (photo Oz Horine) is one of our targets on this trip.

New Zealand is one of the most remote places on earth, and during 80 million years of isolation a fascinating and unique fauna evolved. In the absence of mammals, except for bats and marine species, birds became the dominant animals, and they evolved to fill most available niches. Many became flightless, and some grew to be giants, including a huge eagle and the giant browsing moas. Sadly, with the occupation of New Zealand by Polynesians about 800 years ago and Europeans in the 19th century, many of the endemic species became extinct, including the eagle and the moas. Of those species that survived some are still common, others are rare but still found on the larger islands, and many are only found in carefully managed populations on small predator-free islands. The stories of how New Zealanders have protected their birds are extraordinary, and these stories play an important role in our tour of New Zealand.

This itinerary is designed to find as many of the endemic species as possible, as well as species introduced by Europeans and the many species that have introduced themselves from Australia. Located in the Southern Ocean, New Zealand is also rich in oceanic species of birds and mammals, and our itinerary includes pelagic tours at three key locations.

The tour starts in Auckland, with a few days in Northland, looking for **North Island Brown Kiwi**, the first of the five kiwi species we hope to find, the rare **New Zealand Plover**, **Fairy Tern**, and many more.

Our first pelagic trip is on the Hauraki Gulf, where **New Zealand Storm Petrel**, a recently rediscovered species, is just one of our many target species.

Our journey then takes us to Tiritiri Matangi Island, the first of three predator-free islands we will visit, to see rare endemics, including **North Island Saddleback** and **Stitchbird**, then south to the wader haven at Miranda.

Among the migratory waders we should find the only bird in the world with a sideways curving beak, the **Wrybill**. In the temperate rainforests of the central North Island we hope to find **North Island Kokako**, **New Zealand Kaka**, and other forest endemics. In the fast-flowing rivers we look for the very rare Whio - the **Blue Duck**.

After crossing Cook Strait from Wellington to Picton, our tour continues on the South Island.

During a boat trip on the Marlborough Sounds we visit a colony of **Rough-faced (King) Shag**, which is only found in this isolated location and on Motuara Island, another predator-free reserve.

At picturesque Kaikoura a unique phenomenon provides the ideal location for our next pelagic cruise. This is the only place in New Zealand where there is no continental shelf, and the sea plummets 1000m just offshore. Albatross, shearwaters, and petrels can be seen just minutes from the shore, and marine mammals are abundant.

We cross over the Southern Alps, the junction between two great tectonic plates, to the West Coast to look for two more kiwi species, the elusive **Great Spotted Kiwi** and the rarest species, the **Okarito Kiwi**.

We travel down the rugged and wet West Coast and cross back across the divide at Haast Pass.

We visit the dramatic fjord called Milford Sound, looking for **Fiordland Penguin** and, amongst the rocks en route, the tiny alpine **New Zealand Rock Wren** and the world's only alpine parrot, the **Kea**.

Stewart Island, New Zealand's third-largest island, is our destination for our third pelagic adventure.

The tour finishes in Dunedin with a visit to the only mainland colony in the world of **Northern Royal Albatross** and to a colony of the endemic Hoiho – the **Yellow-eyed Penguin**.

The food in New Zealand is legendary, especially the wonderful fresh seafood, the accommodations are varied and interesting, the scenery is spectacular, and the locals are the friendliest people on the planet.

Please note that the detailed itinerary below cannot be guaranteed as it is only a rough guide and can be changed (usually slightly) due to factors such as availability of accommodation, updated information on the state of accommodation, roads, or birding sites, the discretion of the guides and other factors.

Please also note: The trip leaves Auckland early in the morning on Day 1; therefore guests should arrive in Auckland a day early. If you need information about Auckland hotels in the area where it would be easiest for you to be picked up please notify us, and we will be happy to be of assistance.

Itinerary (18 days/17 nights)

Day 1. Auckland to the Bay of Islands

We depart from Auckland to travel north to the Bay of Islands, where we will spend the evening looking for our first kiwi species, the **North Island Brown Kiwi**. Stops en route to Kerikeri will give us the chance to see our first endemics, **Tui** and **New Zealand Bellbird**, both honeyeaters, the Kereru or **New Zealand Pigeon**, **New Zealand Fantail**, and **Grey Gerygone**. At Waipu Estuary we should see the rare, endemic **New Zealand Plover**, **Fairy Tern**, and a range of more common shorebirds.

Overnight: Kerikeri

Day 2. The Bay of Islands to Tiritiri Matangi Island

The Bay of Islands is one of the most historic and scenic areas of New Zealand. We will visit Waitangi, where in 1840 a treaty was signed between the Maori and the British, which has only been properly ratified in recent years. The Whare Runanga ("meeting house") here is New Zealand's most historic site. We will also visit Russell, the first European settlement in New Zealand.

On our way south we will search for many species, including **Swamp Harrier, New Zealand Pipit, South Island** and **Variable Oystercatchers, Double-banded Plover** (Banded Dotterel), the endangered **Brown Teal, New Zealand Fernbird** (a very cryptic species), **White-fronted Tern**, and many more.

Late in the day we will catch a water taxi to Tiritiri Matangi Island, where we will spend the night in bunkhouse accommodations.

New Zealand has a large number of enthusiastic and passionate conservation volunteers, and this island is an example of what they can achieve. Volunteers, including school groups, have transformed this island from a grassy, treeless paddock, used to graze sheep, to a predator-free forest, now home to some of New Zealand's rarest birds. Over 200,000 native plants have been planted to create a variety of habitats.

At night we have a good chance of seeing **Little Spotted Kiwi**.

Overnight: Tiritiri Matangi Island

Day 3. Tiritiri Matangi Island, transfer to Snells Beach

We start the day with the magnificent dawn chorus. Sir Joseph Banks, when traveling with Captain Cook, described the dawn chorus in New Zealand as the most melodic he had ever heard. With the clearing of forests and the introduction of mammalian predators the forests became quiet, but on the predator-free islands like Tiritiri it is possible to get an idea of what he meant. This will be a special morning on our journey. We will spend the morning on the island, enjoying its prolific numbers of birds. Bird species we hope to see here include **North Island Saddleback, Stitchbird, Whitehead, North Island Kokako, Mohoau** (also called North Island Takahe, a flightless rail), **New Zealand Robin**, and **Little (Blue) Penguin**. before crossing back to the mainland and going to Snells Beach for two nights.

Overnight: Snells Beach

Day 4. Hauraki Gulf pelagic boat trip

This is the first of three pelagic trips planned for this tour. Each pelagic features different species, although of course there will be some overlap. The featured birds on this trip are **New Zealand Storm Petrel, White-faced Storm Petrel, Fluttering, Fresh-footed, Little**, and **Buller's Shearwaters**, and sub-tropical **Kermadec, White-necked, Black-winged, Cook's**, and **Pycroft's Petrels**. We could also see marine mammals, including dolphins and Bryde's Whales, and other marine species.

Overnight: Snells Beach

Day 5. Miranda Shorebird Centre and Pureora Forest Park

From Snells Beach we drive south to the mudflats at Miranda Shorebird Centre, a renowned location for migratory waders and the summer residence for many of New Zealand's only endemic wader, the **Wrybill**. Wrybill is unique in the bird world as it is the only species that has a beak that curves sideways. During the spring breeding season this enigmatic bird inhabits the vast braided streams of the South Island, where it nests amongst the rocks.

The endemic **Black-fronted Tern**, which also breeds in southern streams, may also be present. Migratory waders found at Miranda include **Far Eastern Curlew, Bar-tailed Godwit, Sharp-tailed Sandpiper, Red-necked Stint, Red Knot**, and also many other rarer species.

Our journey continues south to Pureora Forest Park, one of the most beautiful forests in New Zealand and home to **New Zealand Kaka** (a large parrot), **Rifleman** (New Zealand's smallest

bird), **New Zealand Falcon**, **North Island Kokako**, **Tomtit**, **Long-tailed Cuckoo**, **Shining Bronze Cuckoo**, and **Yellow-crowned Parakeet**. We stay for two nights at Blackfern Lodge, which is next to a river that has a resident population of the rare Whio or **Blue Duck**, an endemic resident of fast-flowing mountain streams.

Overnight: Blackfern Lodge

Day 6. Pureora district

The forests at Pureora Forest Park are often referred to as the ‘dinosaur forests’, because they are dominated by ancient conifers in the Podocarpaceae family. Podocarps were the dominant trees in Gondwana 100 million years ago and are still dominant in some of New Zealand’s rainforest, and no more so than at Pureora. We will start our day in this forest listening to the dawn chorus, which here may include the beautiful calls of **North Island Kokako**. This is the only New Zealand wattlebird that still lives on the mainland. Although a large and noisy bird, it lives high in the canopy and may be hard to see. During the rest of the day we will travel around the region, looking for a range of species, including **New Zealand Grebe**, **New Zealand Scaup**, Whio – the **Blue Duck**, and many more.

Overnight: Blackfern Lodge

Day 7, Pureora to Picton

This is a traveling day with not much time for birdwatching, although we will stop to look for **Shore Dotterel**. In Wellington, the capital city, we catch the inter-island ferry to the South Island port of Picton. The three-hour journey crosses Cook Strait, the narrow stretch of open sea between the two main islands, and journeys through the quiet waters of the Marlborough Sounds. Cook Strait is an excellent location for pelagic species, which should include our first albatross species.

Overnight: Picton

Day 8. Picton to Kaikoura

A morning cruise on a small boat takes us back up Queen Charlotte Sound to Motuara Island, the second of the three predator-free island sanctuaries we will visit during the tour.

Here we see **South Island Saddleback** and the South Island subspecies of **New Zealand Robin**, both of which are very tame. **New Zealand Bellbird**, **Silvereye**, and **New Zealand Fantail** are common, and **New Zealand Falcon** is sometimes seen.

Back on the water we search for the rare, locally endemic **Rough-faced (King) Shag**, which is confined to the Marlborough Sounds, **Australian Pied** and **Little Pied Cormorants**, **Spotted Shag**, **Australasian Gannet**, **Fluttering Shearwater**, **Little (Blue) Penguin**, **Caspian Tern**, and **White-faced Heron**.

After returning to Picton we drive south through the Marlborough wine country, internationally renowned for its superb sauvignon blanc wines, to the east coast town of Kaikoura. En route we will stop at a wetland to look for **Australasian Shoveler**, **Pacific Black (Grey) Duck**, **Paradise Shelduck**, **Grey Teal**, and **New Zealand Scaup**.

With a backdrop of steep mountains and sea that plunges into a deep ocean trough, Kaikoura is not only spectacular to look at, but it is also a perfect habitat for pelagic animals. Sperm Whales are resident, Humpback Whales are seasonal visitors, Dusky Dolphins are abundant, the tiny, rare Hector’s Dolphin is frequently seen, and there is a New Zealand Fur Seal colony close to the

town. Pelagic birds, including albatross species and giant petrels, are often seen from the shore. **Hutton's Shearwater** breeds near the tops of the 2500m mountain range behind the town.

Not surprisingly, Kaikoura's economy is based on whale watching, swimming with dolphins, and albatross viewing, as well as commercial diving for crayfish and pāua (abalone).

As well as targeting pelagics we will also look for a rare introduced species, **Cirl Bunting**. Throughout our journey we will also see a number of species introduced from Europe, including **Common Chaffinch**, **Yellowhammer**, **European Greenfinch**, **European Goldfinch**, **Common Redpoll**, **Common Blackbird**, **Song Thrush**, **House Sparrow**, and **Dunnock**.

Overnight: Kaikoura.

Day 9. Kaikoura pelagic, Paparoa National Park

An early morning out on the ocean from Kaikoura is the best possible way to start the day. Because conditions are so perfect for pelagic birds we don't travel far, or for long, but we do see a lot of species. Possibilities include **Antipodean Albatross**, **Northern** and **Southern Royal Albatross**, **Shy**, **Salvin's**, **Buller's**, and **Black-browed Albatross**, **Southern** and **Northern Giant Petrels**, **Common Diving**, **Westland**, and **White-chinned Petrels**, **Hutton's** and **Buller's Shearwaters**, and the abundant **Cape Petrel**. Like all pelagic trips this is dependent on getting suitable weather.

Later in the day we cross over the Southern Alps via Lewis Pass to the West Coast region of the South Island. Our destination is Paparoa National Park and the small community of Punakaiki, which is famous for its unusual limestone formations known as the Pancake Rocks. The surrounding forests are home to the largest species of **Kiwi**, the **Great Spotted**, which is the target of this evening's nocturnal walk.

Overnight: Punakaiki.

Day 10. Punakaiki to Franz Josef

Our main focus today is to see the Rowi or **Okarito Kiwi**, a relatively new split from the South Island Brown Kiwi. This will occur at night, so the day will be spent traveling down the coast and visiting a few birding spots and the region's small but interesting towns. In Franz Josef we will visit the nearby glacier, which is fed from New Zealand's highest mountains in the Southern Alps, which tower over the town. The glacier comes down nearly to sea level, but it sadly is retreating rapidly at present.

Birds we hope to see today include **Great Egret**, a bird revered by the Maori, who call it Kotuku, **Royal Spoonbill**, **Weka** (a flightless rail), and **Sacred Kingfisher**.

Overnight: Franz Josef

Day 11. Franz Josef to Twizel

We continue down the West Coast, making a few stops at lakes and coastal areas for **Great Crested Grebe**, **Fiordland Penguin**, and **Kea**. The latter are alpine parrots, some of whom haven't read the books that say they are only to be found in alpine areas. We will take a walk on a boardwalk in the flooded kahikatea forests (*Dacrycarpus dacrydioides*) at Ship Creek, before crossing back across the mountains through Haast Pass. The vegetation changes dramatically after we cross the divide, due to the rain shadow from the mountains, and we soon are in tussock grassland. This is a land of lakes, some natural and others created or enhanced by man for hydro-electric power generation. The huge braided rivers that bring the meltwater from the mountains are where our next target species lives.

The Kaki or **Black Stilt**, which is one of New Zealand's rarest birds, breeds along the rivers in this area, and we will spend what is left of today, and some of tomorrow if necessary, looking for this elusive bird. Like so many rare New Zealand birds, it owes its survival to micro-management by conservation authorities, who operate captive breeding facilities, and private conservation groups.

Overnight: Twizel or Omarama

Day 12. Twizel to Te Anau

After we have found the Kaki (no guarantees), we travel across the vast expanse of the tussock grasslands through farmland and hills to Te Anau, a pretty town on a beautiful, deep lake.

We stay here for two nights and have time to relax and catch our breath. A must do activity in Te Anau is to see the movie "Ata Whenua – Shadowland", a stunning look at the surrounding World Heritage-listed landscape of Fiordland.

Overnight: Te Anau.

Day 13. Milford Sound

The view of Mitre Peak in Milford Sound is one of the most photographed scenes in New Zealand – for those lucky enough to see it. Milford gets three meters of rain a year, so the odds of a clear day aren't good. But wonderful though it would be to see the spectacular scenery, the main focus on our fiord cruise is to see **Fiordland Penguin**.

On our way back to Te Anau we will stop at the southern entrance to Homer Tunnel to look for the tiny **New Zealand Rock Wren** and **Kea**, and at Lake Gunn and other beech forest areas to look for **Yellowhead**, **New Zealand Kaka**, **Yellow-crowned Parakeet**, **Pipipi**, **New Zealand Robin**, **Rifleman**, and the black form of **New Zealand Fantail**.

Day 14. Te Anau to Stewart Island

Our destination today is the third-largest island in New Zealand, Rakiura or Stewart Island. We drive to Bluff, the most southerly mainland town, to catch the ferry across to Oban, the only town on the island. There are very few roads on the island, so we have to catch water-taxis and walk to get around. Only a tiny portion of the island is inhabited, and most of the rest is national park and clothed in primary native forest. This was the last stronghold of many native species, including the critically endangered flightless parrot, the **Kakapo**, but even here introduced predators caused extinctions.

New Zealand Kaka, **New Zealand Pigeon**, **New Zealand Bellbird**, and **Tui** are common around the town, and a trip to predator-free Ulva Island will provide the opportunity to see **Red-crowned** and **Yellow-crowned Parakeets**, **Weka**, **South Island Saddleback**, **Yellowhead**, and very tame **New Zealand Robin**, and there is a slight chance of seeing kiwi.

This evening we will go on a short boat ride to see our last **Kiwi** species, **Southern Brown**, feeding on a beach.

Overnight: Oban

Day 15. Stewart Island pelagic

This epic day takes us down the east coast of Rakiura to the Southern Ocean at South West Cape. It could be rough, so we will need to be prepared, but the rewards will make it a very special day. The birds won't all be new, but we are sure to see many species not seen at Kaikoura. Possibilities include most of the albatross species, **Sooty Shearwater**, **Brown Skua**,

Mottled Petrel, several prion species, **Yellow-eyed, Fiordland**, and **Little (Blue) Penguin**, and **Antarctic Tern**. As with all pelagic trips, it is the unpredictable sightings that make the experience so exciting.

Overnight: Oban

Day 16. Stewart Island to Dunedin

We catch the ferry back across Foveaux Strait to Bluff and drive to Dunedin, looking for any birds we may have missed on the trip so far.

Overnight: Dunedin

Day 17. Dunedin

Taiaroa Head, the only mainland breeding site of **Northern Royal Albatross**, is our destination in the morning. The hides there allow reasonably close views of the birds, including chicks. Below the hide there is a colony of **Bronze** (Stewart Island) and **Spotted Shags**.

Later in the day we will visit a colony of New Zealand's rarest endemic penguin, Hoiho, the **Yellow-eyed Penguin**.

Overnight: Dunedin

Day 18. Departure

After 17 unforgettable days enjoying New Zealand's avian wonders, sadly today our flights will leave for home.

Duration: 18 days

Limit: 4 – 8

Date: 2 – 19 February 2019

Start: Auckland

End: Dunedin

Price: NZ\$9,874 per person sharing, assuming 8 participants;
NZ\$10,437 per person sharing, assuming 6 – 7 participants;
NZ\$12,235 per person sharing, assuming 4 – 5 participants.

Single supplement: NZ\$1,379

Price includes:

Meals

Accommodation

Guiding fees

Entrance fees

All transport while on tour

Bottled water throughout the tour

Price excludes:

International flights

Items of a personal nature, e.g. gifts

Drinks

Laundry

Personal insurance
Gratuities