

New Zealand's Natural History

Naturetrek Tour Itinerary

Departs

October and November

Dates and Prices

See website (tour code NZL02) or brochure

Grading

Frequent day walks. Fairly easy and optional. Grade A/B

Focus

New Zealand's natural heritage and wildlife, especially birds

Highlights

- Watch Australasian Gannets soaring in to their scattered rock colonies
- Saddleback, Stitchbird, & Takahē on Tiritiri Matangi Island
- Listen for the haunting call of the Kōkako
- Visit spectacular Tongariro, a place of great significance to the Māori people
- Little Spotted Kiwi on Kapiti Island
- Encounter albatrosses, shearwaters & petrels crossing Cook Strait to South Island
- Hector's & Dusky Dolphins, plus seabirds on boat trip from Kaikoura
- Look for rare Westland Black Petrel & Fiordland Crested Penguin
- Visit Mount Cook National Park & enjoy Fiordland's stunning glaciated scenery
- Watch Brown Kiwis on Stewart Island, plus Shy Albatross & Yellow-eyed Penguins
- Look for Yellowhead, Kea & Rock Wren, near Milford Sound



From top to bottom: Australasian Gannets, Hooker Valley, South Island and Little Spotted Kiwi



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Outline itinerary

Day 1/2	Depart London/in flight	Day 12	Arthur's Pass and Hokitika
Day 3	Auckland	Day 13	Westland National Park
Day 4	Tiritiri Matangi Island	Day 14	Lake Moeraki
Day 5	Miranda Wildlife Sanctuary, Rotorua and Taupo	Day 15	Lake Ohau
Day 6	Pureora Forest Park	Day 16/17	Stewart Island
Day 7	Tongariro National Park	Day 18/19	Fiordland National Park and World Heritage area
Day 8	Kapiti Island	Day 20	Dunedin
Day 9	Cook Strait and Picton	Day 21	Depart Dunedin
Day 10	Marlborough Sounds	Day 22	Arrive London
Day 11	Kaikoura		

Itinerary

Please note that the itinerary below offers our planned programme of excursions. However, adverse weather & other local considerations can necessitate some re-ordering of the programme during the course of the tour, though this will always be done to maximise best use of the time and weather conditions available.

Days 1 - 2

In flight

Our scheduled flight departs from London Heathrow, bound for Auckland in New Zealand. Day 2 quickly passes as we cross the various time zones.

Day 3

Auckland

We will arrive at Auckland International Airport this morning. On arrival we will be met by our New Zealand guide and naturalist and we will arrange a gentle introduction to the west coast. Leaving the bustle of the city behind, we will watch Australasian Gannets soaring in towards their dotted rock outcrop colonies, before a relaxed walk in an area of rainforest rounds off our first day. Tonight will be spent in our hotel which is situated to the north of Auckland, where an early night will no doubt be popular!

Day 4

Tiritiri Matangi Island

Tiritiri Matangi is an island sanctuary in the Hauraki Gulf, just north of Auckland and reached by boat from Whangaparaoa Peninsula. Many of New Zealand's rare and endangered species now only remain on islands such as this, as the habitat can be protected from the ravages of rats, possums and stoats. Tiritiri Matangi is the site of an ambitious restoration project which started 18 years ago, and already the fruits of the conservationists' efforts are being appreciated by many.

This small island situated in the Hauraki Gulf Maritime Park has no introduced animals, despite having been a lighthouse station for many years. It is now a nature reserve, much of which has been replanted and a number of rare New Zealand birds have been reintroduced. We will have a day visit to this picturesque island to enjoy birdsong in regenerated forest, including that of reintroduced rare species such as the Saddleback, Stitchbird, Kōkako, Whitehead and Red-crowned Parakeet. Also on the island are abundant Tui and Bellbirds, the unique Takahē, and the very rare Brown Teal. Sailing by ferry to the island we may see Australasian Gannets, Black Petrels, Cook's Petrel and Buller's Shearwaters. We will return to our hotel in the late afternoon.

Day 5

Miranda Wildlife Sanctuary

Within an hour's drive south-east of Auckland lies the Miranda Wildlife Sanctuary, an extensive area of tidal mudflats on the Firth of Thames and a fine feeding ground for many wading birds, which migrate from the tundra of the arctic regions for the northern winter. This will provide one of the best opportunities to observe both migratory and endemic wading birds. Among the thousands of Eastern Bar-tailed Godwits on the shellbanks or silt flats, we may view many Knots and South Island Pied Oystercatchers, the rare endemic Wrybill, the endangered New Zealand Dotterel, Turnstone, Sharp-tailed Sandpipers, Caspian Tern, Black-billed Gull and Sacred Kingfisher. This first full day in the field will also enable us to become acquainted with some of the more common New Zealand birds which will become almost daily sights such as White-faced Heron, Paradise Shelduck, Spur-winged Plover, Pukeko, Australasian Harrier and Welcome Swallow.

We travel south towards Lake Rotorua, where New Zealand Dabchick, New Zealand Scaup and Little Black Shags can easily be watched from the shoreline. Rotorua is situated in the central plateau of the North Island, a region of much geothermal activity and a centre of Māori spirituality, culture and traditions spanning centuries. We will walk to see evidence of relatively recent activity at Waimangu, a volcanic valley of boiling cauldron lakes. Birds to look out for today include Tui, Bellbird, New Zealand Robin, New Zealand Scaup, Little Pied Cormorant, and Black-billed and Red-billed Gulls.



Lake Rotorua

Nearby, the large Lake Taupo fills the crater of a volcano which erupted many thousands of years ago, spilling lava and debris over a huge area of the South Pacific. Today, Taupo is a popular recreational lake probably best known for its trout fisheries but, like Rotorua, the underground geothermal activity here is evidenced by numerous hot pools emitting clouds of steam, and a constant supply of naturally heated water for our hotel rooms!

Day 6

Taupo

This morning we undertake a pre-dawn start, in order to experience the haunting call of the rare, endangered Kōkako in its natural, misty rainforest environment. The Kōkako belongs to the family

Callaeidae, a very ancient family which does not appear to be related to any other in the world. Pureora Forest Park contains one of the finest areas of podocarp forest in the country, as well as a large variety of native invertebrates, like the curious *Peripatus*, and numerous birds. The dense stands of fine native trees include the dominant podocarp conifers Kahikatea, Rimu, Matai, Miro and Totara. We will have most of morning to gain more insight into the nature and conservation of this special forest, and to enjoy the sounds of Kaka, Yellow-crowned Parakeet, Tomtit, New Zealand Robin, Long-tailed Cuckoo, New Zealand Falcon, Whitehead and Grey Warbler.

We leave Lake Taupo and drive south to Tongariro National Park. En route we look for the endemic New Zealand Fernbird and will also hope to find the beautiful little Shining Cuckoo in roadside forests. Another diversion will take us into the region of fast flowing streams and rolling hills much beloved by another highly specialised and increasingly rare New Zealand endemic, the Blue Duck. With luck we may find several pairs of this Antipodean version of the Torrent Duck and could even repeat the success of our 2017 group by seeing newly hatched ducklings.



Shining Cuckoo

Day 7

Tongariro National Park

Tongariro National Park was New Zealand's first national park, and is a place of great spiritual significance to the indigenous Māori people. The park offers us a wonderful perspective of these volcanic landscapes and the conservation issues that affect the area. We will walk amongst the sub-alpine forest and tussocklands on the slopes of Mt. Ruapehu, the North Island's highest peak which may be more familiar internationally as the setting for Mordor in the 'Lord of the Rings' trilogy. The adjacent Mt Ngauruhoe was 'Mount Doom' in the films. During our exploration of the area we may see the endemic New Zealand Fernbird and Rifleman against a spectacular mountain backdrop.

Day 8

Kapiti Island

Today we will begin the day with a morning drive south off the volcanic plateau. We will arrive at



Morepork

Paraparaumu beach and take a short boat trip across the island sanctuary of Kapiti Island. Here we will be able to enjoy further opportunities to view Weka, Saddleback, and Kaka. By night we will seek out the endangered Little Spotted Kiwi, and New Zealand's only native owl, the Morepork. Accommodation is in basic lodge accommodation, where the rooms are small dorm style and the bathrooms are shared.

Day 9

Picton

Our journey continues southwards through to Wellington, New Zealand's capital city, where we will embark on a ferry crossing to the South Island. The drive south takes us across the fertile farming area where sheep dominate, although increasingly this area is gaining a reputation for its wine growing and horticulture. Three hours on the ferry, however, is at times not enough for all the wildlife watching to be done and the trip will be an ideal opportunity for those interested in seabirds to add to their list! Wandering and Shy Albatrosses often pass by, as do Northern Giant Petrels, Arctic Skuas, and many shearwaters. Cape Petrel, Fluttering Shearwater, Fairy Prion and Westland Black Petrel are all possibilities. Towards the entrance to the Marlborough Sounds Little Blue Penguins and Spotted Shags can often be seen and sometimes dolphins. If we are lucky we might glimpse Bottlenose, Dusky or Common Dolphins and perhaps even a Pilot Whale.

Day 10

Marlborough Sounds



Marlborough Sounds

The waters and inlets of the Marlborough Sounds will be our playground this morning. A charter vessel will carry us through Queen Charlotte Sound, frequented by hundreds of Fluttering Shearwaters, to a lone rocky islet, where a small colony of the rare King Shag breeds and roosts. Close by lies a meeting place of the Tasman Sea and the Pacific Ocean, where we will be able to see several pelagic species at close quarters as they swarm around this rich

feeding ground. Possibilities here include Blue Penguin, Fairy Prion and Common Diving Petrel. Before returning to Picton, we will land to introduce ourselves to the curious Weka. Mid-afternoon will see us heading south down the east coast to Kaikoura, where we will stay for two nights.

Day 11

Kaikoura

Kaikoura is a breathtaking place where snow-iced mountains reach down to a turquoise sea. The continental shelf drops abruptly very close to shore, resulting in upwellings of nutrients from the sea's depths, attracting a rich and abundant marine life.

An excellent opportunity for bird lovers and generalists alike is the morning seabird excursion, where one can see flocks of cawing albatrosses (4-5 species), together with numerous petrels and shearwaters, just metres from the boat.

Sightings could include seabirds such as Wandering, Black-browed and Shy Albatrosses, Giant Petrels, Cape Petrels, Westland Black Petrels and thousands of Hutton's Shearwaters, an enigmatic shearwater which is known to breed at only one place in the hills behind Kaikoura!



Shy Albatross

Today's afternoon will be at leisure, where one may choose to stroll along the Kaikoura Peninsula or perhaps undertake one of the regular whale viewing trips which leave several times a day from the town. This excursion is not included in the tour price and will cost approximately NZ\$145. Sperm Whales are seen on most outings at this season, and other possible Cetacea may include Dusky Dolphins, which often accompany the vessels into port, Orcas and even the occasional Blue Whale or Southern Right Whale.

Day 12

Arthur's Pass National Park

Our journey carries us across the vastness of the Canterbury Plains, and over the main divide via Arthur's Pass, a route once used by Māori. This route across the Southern Alps will introduce us to the vegetation and birds found in the mountainous regions of South Island. Black-fronted Terns are regularly seen on the flats leading up to the pass, and in Arthur's Pass National Park we may encounter the cheeky Kea looking for scraps around the settlement. We will stop overnight at a coastal motel at Hokitika.

Day 13

Westland

This morning we will have a leisurely start, travelling down the wild and wet west coast on avenues framed by the green lushness of rainforest. Amongst this landscape is our next stop, the Ōkārito



Royal Spoonbill

Lagoon, where in gentle wetlands Fernbirds may be found, as may the striking White Heron, or Great White Egret, together with Royal Spoonbills. If time permits, we may also venture into the forest near the Westland National Park to enjoy its lushness and perhaps see the Brown Creeper.

The Westland National Park is home to approximately 60 glaciers, which are unique in the world for their location in the middle of the rainforest and so close to the sea. With climate change, access is becoming increasingly challenging, but we'll endeavour to view one, or more, of these incredible glaciers during our stay, and look for Kakas and Keas which also occur in the National Park. We will spend the evening looking for the endangered Ōkārito Brown Kiwi.

Day 14

Lake Moeraki

Near the peaceful Lake Moeraki, a delightful walk to the coast through a tract of superlative forest, brings us onto a golden beach, where there is a northern breeding colony of the rare Fiordland Crested Penguin. These entertaining birds are strictly protected but from a safe distance we can sit and watch the adults braving the crashing breakers to bring food for their hidden youngsters.

Ascending Haast Pass through the Southern Beech forests may provide us with further opportunities to view forest species. We drive along the Haast pass through the Alps to Wanaka then head north again through the Lindis Pass. Thereafter we leave the forest journeying through the vast rolling Otago landscape of schist rock, and the tussockland and clear turquoise lakes of the McKenzie Basin. Birding possibilities include Great White Egret and maybe Royal Spoonbill as well as numerous Black Swans, Paradise Shelduck and other wildfowl.



Paradise Shelduck

The braided rivers in this region are the habitat of the endangered Black Stilt, and later in the day we will look for these rare waders along with Black-fronted Tern, Banded Dotterel, Grey Duck and a range of inland waterfowl.

Day 15

Lake Ohau

We will spend much of the day in the vicinity of Twizel and head towards the grandness of the snow-topped peaks of Mount Cook National Park. Mount Cook's visual impact is better described by its Māori name "Aoraki" or "Cloud Piercer". Driving alongside the enormous crater Lake Pukaki we draw ever closer to the magnificent snow-capped peaks which comprise this montane National Park and include not only Mount Cook itself, at 3754 metres the highest peak in New Zealand, but 20 other mountains over 3,000 metres in height. The scenery is stunning and a well maintained



Pied Stilt

road facilitates easy access to the very heart of the mountains. Our walk amongst the myriad of alpine shrubs, grasses and herbs in the vicinity of Aoraki, will be punctuated with the clicking of alpine crickets. Today, the birds are secondary to the grandeur of the scenery but even so a number of high altitude species such as Rifleman and Kea may be seen near Mount Cook. Investigation of the wetlands at the northern end of Lake Pukaki could produce Wrybill, Banded

Dotterel, and even possibly a Black Stilt among the numerous Pied Stilts. We may also be fortunate to catch a glimpse of the New Zealand endemic falcon overhead, aptly named the New Zealand Falcon. We will stay in accommodation close to Lake Ohau tonight.

Day 16

Stewart Island

Today will be occupied with a long, but interesting, drive to Invercargill, New Zealand's southernmost city, where we catch a late afternoon flight or ferry to the almost pristine Stewart Island. If conditions permit we will head out later on an evening excursion, by boat and foot, to observe the Stewart Island Brown Kiwi in its natural habitat, a remarkable experience which will mean a very late return to our hotel in the early hours of the morning but is one of the great attractions of a visit to Stewart Island. It is claimed that there are more Kiwis than humans on Stewart

Island, a ratio unique to this island, but even here it is very difficult to find these nocturnal creatures and it is only the local knowledge of the guide which enables visitors to stand on a remote isolated beach to watch in awe as one or more Kiwis emerge from cover to pick their way along the tide-line debris.

Stewart Island is an example of what mainland New Zealand must once have been like and even around the settlement of Oban, Tuis are abundant, Kakas fearlessly inhabit the gardens and Red-crowned Parakeets chatter in the trees. Introduced Redpolls, numerous throughout South Island, are particularly common on Stewart Island often feeding on the grass in front of our hotel.

Day 17

Stewart Island

A day marine charter to Paterson Inlet and into the South Pacific will invigorate us with opportunities to observe a rich diversity of seabirds. Among the bays of the inlet we will scan for two very rare penguin species: the Yellow-eyed Penguin and the Fiordland Crested Penguin. Out at sea we may encounter several species of albatross, including Shy, Black-browed and Buller's, and the Southern Giant Petrel, Southern Great Skua, and Common Diving Petrel. We are also likely to come across large numbers of Stewart Island Shags, which breed nearby on the small outer islands, Blue Penguins, Fur Seals and possibly New Zealand Sealion. A treat awaits us on Ulva Island; a bird sanctuary rich in lush podocarp forest, and ringing with the sounds of Kaka, Tui, Bellbird, New Zealand Robin and Red-crowned Parakeet. Flocks of Brown Creeper may be seen here and we have another chance of finding a Mōhua, or Yellowhead, as some of these rare birds have been released on Ulva. The Stewart Island Weka is also a popular resident which will probably greet our arrival at the jetty.



Yellow-eyed Penguin

Day 18

Fiordland National Park

We fly (or take the ferry) back to Invercargill and head into the glacially sculpted mountains and valleys of the Fiordland National Park. Our base for two nights will be a motel in the picturesque Te Anau Downs. This is an area of great natural beauty but there are also some interesting birds to be found in the vicinity of our accommodation including the often elusive Long-tailed Cuckoo.

Beyond Te Anau we will explore the evergreen Southern Beech Forests of the Eglington Valley. In these forests, which bear little or no resemblance to those of the northern hemisphere, dwell the Yellow-crowned Parakeet, Kaka, and the now threatened Mōhua (Yellowhead). We will stay in Te Anau for two nights.

Day 19

Fiordland National Park

A drive along the Eglinton River to the Hollyford Valley will delight us with mountain scenery. In this valley we will seek out some unique endemic species, including the ubiquitous and cheeky Kea, and if we are very lucky, the tiny Rock Wren, which is more at home high in the mountains. Fiordland is famous for its rainfall, but if weather conditions allow, then a walk through the flower-sprinkled herb fields of the Gertrude Valley will be inviting. Tour members may wish to join an optional boat cruise below the vertical cliffs and waterfalls of Milford Sound (actually a fiord), to where it meets the sea, during which we may see Fiordland Crested Penguin, Fur Seals and Bottlenose and Dusky Dolphins. (This excursion is not included in the tour price and will cost approximately NZ\$65). We will return in the early evening to Te Anau.

Day 20

Dunedin

Leaving this land of fiords, we make our way again to the east, arriving in Dunedin, New Zealand's "wildlife capital", in the early afternoon. A charming harbour cruise will take us around Taioia Head, the only mainland breeding site of Northern Royal Albatross. With a wingspan of three metres, these seabirds are certainly impressive, soaring over cliffs dotted with nests of Royal Spoonbills, Spotted Shags and the rarer Stewart Island Shags. Passing rocky shelves of lounging New Zealand Fur Seals we will sail, on our way back down the harbour towards the central city. This is indeed, a magical wildlife experience, drawing to a close our rich and diverse discovery of New Zealand's native treasures. We will stay in Dunedin tonight.



Day 21

In flight

This will be a free morning in Dunedin city, before an afternoon flight from Dunedin to Auckland International Airport, where will connect with our flight to London.

Day 22

London

We will arrive back in London today.

Tour grading

Grade A/B. The walking on this holiday is comprised of frequent day walks (usually involving stretches of no more than two hours or so), normally across easy terrain, although there may be a couple of walks where it is rough or uneven underfoot. Anyone of any age who is reasonably fit and used to walking should cope admirably.

Weather

Seasons in New Zealand are the reverse of those in Europe but the climate is not as extreme. The warmest months are December to February. In mid-summer you can enjoy around 15 hours of daylight. Travelling as we do from the sub-tropical North Island to the temperate South Island, you should expect a great variety of weather conditions. Whilst North Island is likely to be warm, South Island is likely to be decidedly cooler. However, temperature ranges are small by European standards – around 10°C variation between winter and summer. Only the central South Island has extremes approaching a European climate. Areas lying to the west are much wetter than those to the east. Throughout the tour you should expect as much dry and sunny weather as overcast, wet weather. Just imagine you are travelling from Cornwall to the Shetland Islands in May!

Clothing

Please read our separate clothing list included in the pre-departure information sent to you after booking.

Take a couple of sets of smart casual clothes for use in the evenings. Shorts and T-shirts may be useful, depending on the weather; warmer clothing will also be needed. You should also bring good lightweight walking boots that are as waterproof as possible.

Food & accommodation included in the price

All food and accommodation is included in the price. We use a range of motels, hotels and lodges for this tour. Nearly all of these have private facilities, the exceptions being Stewart Island and Kapiti Island. On Kapiti Island there are a limited number of dorm style rooms in basic lodges with shared bathroom facilities. The accommodation has bunk beds and depending on group size, the rooms can sleep up to a maximum of 4 people, so you must be prepared to share just for this one night. There are no single rooms available for this night. Accommodation on Stewart is limited and, whilst we will try to secure rooms with private facilities, these cannot be guaranteed for the two nights we are there if the group should be a large one.

Additional expenditure

Items of personal expenditure such as drinks, laundry etc. Optional boat excursions to view Whales at Kaikoura (approximately NZ\$145) and on Milford Sound (NZ\$65).

How to book your place

In order to book your place on this holiday, please give us a call on 01962 733 051 with a credit or debit card, book online at www.naturetrek.co.uk, or alternatively complete and post the booking form at the back of our main Naturetrek brochure, together with a deposit of 20% of the holiday cost plus any room supplements if required. If you do not have a copy of the brochure, please call us on 01962 733 051 or request one via our website. Please stipulate any special requirements, for example extension requests or connecting/regional flights, at the time of booking.

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