

New Zealand's Natural History

Naturetrek Tour Report

3 - 21 November 2008



Fluke Waterfall - by Barbara Sumner



White-capped Mollymawk, off Stewart Island, NZ - Adrian Sumner



Yellowhead - by Wynston Cooper



Antarctic Fulmar, Kaikoura- by Wynston Cooper

Report compiled by Wynston Cooper



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Early morning kayakers, Lake Moeraki - by Wynston Cooper



Mt Cook 'Lily' by Jim Brown



Kaka, Stewart Island - by Jim Brown



Dusky Dolphin - by Peter Nicholson



Milford Sound - by Wynston Cooper

Tour Leaders: Wynston Cooper (Local Guide)
Geoff Henderson (Local Guide)

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Day 1

Monday 3rd November

AUCKLAND – MURIWAI – CASCADE KAURI

Weather: Fine but partly cloudy at times

With the exception of Adrian and Barbara who had arrived previously, participants were met on their arrival at Auckland International Airport by the tour leaders Wynston and Geoff and transferred to the Hotel Grand Chancellor in downtown Auckland. After checking in and freshening up, we were off at 13:40 NZDT to begin our explorations.

Auckland, the largest urban area in New Zealand contains more than a third of the country's total population and thereby suffers from the same traffic congestion problems as many other major cities around the world – most noticeably crawling lines of vehicles on motorways! Centred on an ancient volcanic field on a neck of land bounded in the west by the Manukau harbour and in the east by the waters of the Hauraki Gulf, it extends far to the north and south. Volcanic fields are noted for the fact that each eruption builds a single volcano, the next eruption occurring in a different spot in the field. The Auckland isthmus has 48 such basaltic cones which have developed over the last 150,000 years; the youngest being Rangitoto Island, which erupted into Waitemata Harbour some 600 years ago.

We soon began to see a wide range of species, albeit mainly introduced ones such as Common Myna, Starlings, House Sparrows, Blackbirds and Song Thrushes, often in densities now seldom seen in their English homeland. Other species seen included the native Pied Shag, Pukeko (Purple Swamphens), Masked Lapwing (known as Spur-winged Plover in New Zealand), Welcome Swallow, Australasian Harrier, and the occasional White-faced Heron.

After a late lunch at a bakery in Kumeu, we headed to Muriwai (40 km NW of central Auckland) where we visited the colony of Australasian Gannets. Originally occupying a distant offshore island the gannets soon spread to closer stacks and then the mainland, where they can now be viewed at close range from two lookout points. The colony was at all stages in its breeding cycle - some birds displaying or prospecting for nest sites whilst others had eggs or downy chicks. We were also able to appreciate the Red-billed Gulls and numerous White-fronted Terns that were nesting on the cliffs near the gannets and also obtain distant views of Variable Oystercatchers (both phases) on the adjacent black sand beach.

We then headed to the 18,000 hectare Waitakere Ranges Regional Park – a remnant of the previously much logged kauri forest that once dominated the area – only to find that the road access was closed because of reconstruction work. Given the lateness of the day we returned to our hotel in downtown Auckland through the rush hour traffic.

Day 2

Tuesday 4th November

AUCKLAND – MIRANDA – TIRITIRI MATANGI

Weather: Fine but overcast

At 08:50 we were off on our journey to Miranda on the Firth of Thames. Once we were off the Southern Motorway the drive took us through rolling green pasturelands. Australasian Harriers were common, and a few Wild Turkeys were seen in the fields. The Firth of Thames which extends north from the Hauraki Plains, is flanked by the bush clad hills of the Hunua Ranges to the west and the Coromandel Ranges to the east, and is renowned for its rare 'Chenier' plain geology of shell ridges and infilled mud. Its 8,500 hectares of flats attract thousands of migratory wading birds from home and abroad. Listed as a wetland of international significance under the Ramsar Convention, it is also an officially designated site on the East Asia-Australasia Shorebird Site Network which seeks to identify and protect key stopover sites used by migratory birds on the journey between their Arctic breeding grounds and wintering sites in Australia and New Zealand.

The Miranda coast is the most important wintering ground for Wrybill Plover, an endemic species which is unique among birds in having a bill curved to the side. The estimated total species population is only 5,300, up to 40% of which flock to Miranda at the end of the breeding season. Another species of note that breeds here is the New Zealand Dotterel.

First stop was the Shorebird Centre where we obtained an update on the species recorded in the area recently before we headed for the main roosting sites at the "Limeworks" site just down the road. Pied Stilt, Eastern Bar-tailed Godwit, Sharp-tailed Sandpiper, Lesser Knot, Royal Spoonbill, South Island Oystercatcher, Black-billed Gull, and a number of Wrybill were soon added to our list. The New Zealand Dotterels though took their time, before finally affording us some great viewing at close range.

We returned to the centre for lunch, after which we returned to Auckland where, because of the limited accommodation available on Tiritiri Matangi Island, the party had to be split; six of the group and Wynston heading off to Gulf Harbour on Whangaparoa Peninsula where they caught a 'water taxi' (small boat) to Tiritiri Matangi Island, a 220 hectare island sanctuary that lies 4 km off the coast.

Tiritiri Matangi (“looking to the wind” or “wind tossing about”) was first inhabited by Maori. Europeans arrived in the mid 1850s and the island was then farmed continuously until the 1970s. A 20.5 metre lighthouse has operated there since 1865. The island is now managed by the Department of Conservation as an open sanctuary, where the public are free to visit and enjoy some of New Zealand’s more unusual and rare fauna. A huge amount of work has been undertaken, mainly by volunteers, to re-plant the island with some 280,000 native trees, both to accelerate the natural regeneration of the coastal forest, and to provide suitable habitat for bird species. A number of rarer species including Saddleback, Robin, Little Spotted Kiwi, Takahe, Kokako and Stitchbird have been introduced to the island.

The party was met by one of the resident Rangers who transported us and our luggage up to the bunkhouse. After an introductory talk on the ‘dos and don’ts’ about the bunkhouse and island the group headed off for a short walk back along the main access road. Birds were plentiful with Tui and Bellbirds predominating, and Saddlebacks, Whiteheads, and brilliantly green Red-crowned Parakeets were quickly added to the species list.

After dinner the group ventured forth armed with torches time masked with red cellophane, in the hope of seeing Little Spotted Kiwi. Originally widespread throughout mainland New Zealand in pre-European times, Little Spotted Kiwi were still common in Westland at the start of the C20th, after which they declined dramatically so that now only a few may persist in forests between Fiordland and north-western Nelson. Fortunately a few survived on D’Urville Island in the Marlborough Sounds, and others had been introduced to Kapiti Island off the southwest coast of North Island probably in the 1920s from South Island. Birds have now been transferred to a number of other islands free of mustelids and cats, including Tiritiri Matangi. From a total of 16 birds introduced to the island from Kapiti in 1993 and 1995 the population on the island has now grown to more than 50.

Having heard at least six Little Spotted Kiwi call but been unable to sight any, the group was making its way back up the road when Wynston suddenly located a bird drinking at one of the roadside water supplies. While it was half turned away from the group and partly obscured by a flax leaf, everyone was able to get a reasonable view over several minutes before it moved off into the surrounding vegetation. The group returned to the bunkhouse in high spirits and was quickly bedded down.

Day 3

Wednesday 5th November

TIRITIRI MATANGI

Weather: Some heavy rain showers overnight, occasional light showers during the morning, fine and clear by mid-afternoon

Some of the party were up and out early to listen to the impressive dawn chorus, but others lingered for a while. After breakfast and completing the required tidying and cleaning of the bunkhouse, the group made its way down Wattle Track to the wharf to meet the rest of the party and Geoff on their arrival on the regular ferry from Auckland and Gulf Harbour.

The first group then continued on around Hobbs Beach, up Kawerau Track which passes through some of the remaining original forest and then along Ridge Track back to the lighthouse area in time for lunch. Meanwhile the second group made its way up Wattle Track to the bunkhouse where it settled in.

The particular 'highlight' species for the day were Stitchbird and Takahe. The Stitchbird is unique in that not only is it a rare New Zealand endemic, but it has recently had an entire new family established for it. This family, Notiomystidae, includes no species other than the Stitchbird (*Notiomystis cincta*). The species was formerly included in the honeyeater family Malophagidae, along with the Tui and Bellbird, towards which it shows superficial convergent evolution through shared behaviour such as nectar feeding. Molecular research has now revealed that the species is in fact more closely related to the Wattlebird family Callaeidae, which comprises the Saddleback, Kokako, and extinct Huia (*Heteralocha acutirostris*). Stitchbirds also have some very unusual unique features. For example:

- it is the only bird known to mate face-to-face;
- while almost all honeyeaters are primarily nectar-feeders that possess a brush-tipped tongue (as do the Tui and Bellbird), the Stitchbird's tongue has the edge curled above to form a tube for most of its length. While the tongues of the Bellbird and Tui are furrowed, they are tubular for a much shorter part of their length than that of the Stitchbird;
- and, unlike the Tui and Bellbird, it has no Australian relatives.

Originally present throughout North Island, Stitchbird declined rapidly from the 1870s, and by 1885 had vanished from the mainland. From 1885 to 1980 it survived only on Little Barrier Island, since when birds have been successfully transferred to a number of other islands. The cause of the rapid decline in the late 1800s is most likely due to the spread of ship rats, stoats and feral cats, and the impact of collectors such as Andreas Reischek who alone shot a total of 150 on Little Barrier during three visits between October 1882 and April 1885. (...this at a time when the species was believed to probably exist only there!).

The Takahe is one of the two members of the rail family endemic to New Zealand. They are large, slow-moving birds with a massive red beak (probably best described as 'Swampheens on anabolic steroids'). Known to Europeans from just four specimens they were thought to be extinct, then, in 1948, they were discovered living in the Murchison Mountains on the western shore of Lake Te Anau. Not prolific breeders at the best of times, they seldom raise more than one of their two chicks to fledging, face competition for food from introduced red deer, and predation by stoats. Current conservation management efforts are aimed at raising breeding success, expanding the population in Fiordland, and consolidating breeding populations on several offshore islands.

Of the other particularly special inhabitant, the Kokako, there was no sign – not even a single call! One of New Zealand's endemic wattlebirds, the Kokako belongs to a group whose ancestors became isolated at the time of the first fragmentation of the southern super-continent, some 80 million years ago. It has colourful fleshy wattles (blue in the case of these, the North Island sub-species, and orange on the believed extinct South Island sub-species). While its short, rounded wings enable only limited flight (more like a downhill glide), their relatively long strong legs enable them to move freely through trees in leaps and bounds – rather monkey like. They are renowned for their rather mournful organ-like song, most often heard about dawn. Its threatened species status is the result of loss of habitat through forest clearance, predation by introduced mammals such as ship rats and possums, and the destruction of under-storey food plants by introduced browsing mammals such as deer and goats. Currently numbering some 1,600 birds the conservation management objective is to raise the population to around 1,000 pairs by the year 2020.

The first group with Wynston left the island on the afternoon ferry.

While the second group with Geoff were unsuccessful in their search for Little Spotted Kiwi, they were recompensed to some extent by obtaining great views of Kokako and Brown Teal, both of which the first group had failed to find.

Day 4

Thursday 6th November

TIRITIRI MATANGI – ROTORUA - TAUPO

Weather: Cool winds, variable cloud, and periods of sunshine

The group on Tiritiri returned to Gulf Harbour on a special return sailing of the morning ferry. Meanwhile Wynston and the rest of the party had loaded all the luggage held in storage at the hotel and then travelled up to meet them. Thence it was southwards down the motorway to lunch at Mercer and then on to Rotorua. Thermal activity is at the heart of much of Rotorua's tourist appeal. Geysers, bubbling mud pools, hot thermal springs, and even a Māori village buried by a major volcanic eruption, are all within easy reach of the city. Threads of steam rise from parks and bush areas and the scent of sulphur wafts through the air. We stopped on the shore of Lake Rotorua near a tree covered with nesting Little and Little Black Shags and spent some time comparing the two species. We also viewed numerous New Zealand Scaup and Black Swan, and eventually managed to obtain views of the scarce New Zealand Dabchick.

Continuing on our southward journey our first stop we stopped at a boiling mud pool at Waiotapu and watched as it bubbled and gurgled much like a massive pot of porridge.

We then passed through some of the many extensive planted forests consisting mainly of *Pinus radiata*. A native of the USA where it is known as Monterey Pine and considered a threatened species, in New Zealand it grows almost twice as fast as in its natural home and is considered a weed where it has spread from plantations. First introduced in the 1850s it now comprises about 80% of New Zealand plantation forests. That night we stayed in Taupo.

Day 5

Friday 7th November

TAUPO - PUREORA FOREST – ORAKEI KORAKO – WHAKAPAPA

Weather: Cool wind, some showers, variable cloud and periods of sunshine

A pre-dawn departure saw us on our way to Pureora Forest, home to some of the mainland Kokako. Arriving at the forest edge we listened for the bird's distinctive song, eventually hearing a few distant calls but obtaining no views of the bird itself. Several very vocal Kaka were seen flying high over the trees, as were a few Yellow-crowned Parakeets. A Long-tailed Cuckoo was also heard and California Quail, New Zealand Robin, New Zealand Fantail, and Tomtit seen.

Later, after a 'picnic breakfast', we walked a short all-weather loop track through some of the forest viewing huge podocarps, many of which were hundreds of years old, drenched with moss, lichens and epiphytes, and a wide range of ferns including New Zealand's national emblem, the Silver Fern.

A stop at the Whakamaru Ponds surprisingly produced only Australian Coot and New Zealand Scaup.

We then drove to the thermal valley of Orakei Korako where we lunched in the café before taking the short boat ride across the Waikato River to the thermal area. This is renowned for its silica terraces, not least of which is the 1.4ha 'Artists Palette', a level silica terrace riddled with hot springs and small geysers and with the wide range of colours which gives it its name. Then there is the Golden Fleece Terrace, a fault scarp dating from c.130AD and built up with centuries of siliceous growth. No less than 35 metres long, 4.6 metres high and 100 mm thick, it is believed to be the largest of its kind in the world. Also 'Aladdin's Cave' with its hot pool, Waiwhakaata ('pool of mirrors'), which is also said to be a wishing pool in which visitors are invited to dip their left hand and make a secret wish.

Our journey then took us south to Taupo and then down the eastern side of Lake Taupo. Lying in a caldera created some 26,500 years ago by a huge eruption, Lake Taupo covers an area of 619 km² and is the largest lake in New Zealand. According to geological records there have been 27 eruptions since then, the last about 1,800 years ago. Said to have been one of the most violent eruptions in the last 5,000 years, the last eruption buried some 20,000 km² of central North Island under pumice and ash. Near the southern end of the lake we stopped beside an area of wetland not far from the lakeshore to look for the endemic Fernbird, a usually secretive skulker. At least five birds were heard and everyone managed excellent views of at least one.

Beyond the hills the road emerged onto a seemingly endless expanse of moorland, covered in introduced heather and native tussock grasses. The scenery was unlike any we had so far encountered and was dominated by the snow-capped and cloud-covered peaks of Mounts Ngauruhoe (2291 m) and Ruapehu (at 2797m the highest in North Island). Both are active volcanoes. Ngauruhoe, an almost perfect cone, was the setting of Mount Doom in the film trilogy Lord of the Rings, while the scoria slopes of Ruapehu were the setting for the realms of Mordor. Our accommodation for the next two nights was at the Skotel at Whakapapa on the slopes of Ruapehu.

Day 6

Saturday 8th November

WHAKAPAPA – RUATITI – WHAKAPAPA

Weather: Fine and sunny

Our first objective today was to find Blue Duck. A nationally endangered endemic, the Blue Duck is the only member of its genus and has no close relative anywhere in the world. Believed to have appeared at a very early stage in evolutionary history, its isolation in New Zealand has resulted in it acquiring a number of unique anatomical and behavioural features. A river species, it is mostly confined to fast flowing unmodified headwater catchments with high water quality, stable banks, and a wide diversity and abundance of aquatic insects. The range and numbers of Blue Ducks have declined since European settlement, mainly it is believed because of the loss of suitable habitat (through vegetation clearance, water diversion, poor water quality, damming for hydro-electric and irrigation schemes), increased mortality by introduced predators (especially stoats), and human disturbance. Nationally there are probably only about 2,500 birds remaining. The Manganuioteao River has one of the highest and most stable populations in the country.

Mount Ruapehu was clear of cloud as we left Whakapapa and Mt Taranaki (formerly Mt Egmont) (2518m) some 120km distant. Our route took us in something of a semi-circle around the south-western side of Ruapehu and then south towards Raetahi from where we wound our way west down through a succession of steep hills to a bridge over the Manganuioteao River.

From the bridge we were able to watch a family (a pair with two ducklings) of Blue Ducks resting on rocks in the river. In the hope of gaining even closer views we then travelled down to the Ruatiti Domain. Unfortunately, any hope of closer sightings was ruined by a pair of anglers being a short distance ahead of us.

We then returned to Whakapapa where, after lunch, we set off on a three hour return walk to Taranaki Falls. This took us across undulating tussock grassland and patches of Southern Beech (*Nothofagus*) forest to the falls which tumble over the edge of a large lava flow. From there we made our way back past the water-worn gorges of the Wairere Stream and then through more beech forest and tussockland to Whakapapa. Along the way all of the party had fine views of New Zealand Pipit and bright green North Island Grasshoppers. Some members also saw a New Zealand Falcon glide across the track behind the group and land amongst rocks on a terrace.

Day 7

Sunday 9th November

WHAKAPAPA – COOK STRAITN – PICTON

Weather: Fine and sunny in the morning. Very cool wind and mainly overcast in Cook Strait

Today was essentially one of travel as we headed towards Wellington and the mid-afternoon ferry crossing to Picton in South Island. A number of small towns we passed through had adopted the practice of erecting large statues of what had been chosen as their community's symbol. These ranged from a sheepdog to an enormous orange carrot, both of which were later surpassed by a giant gumboot (Wellington) made out of sheets of corrugated iron!

The journey over the Cook Strait was remarkably smooth considering the strength of the westerly wind. Bird-wise though it was very quiet, providing us with mainly distant views. We were however able to confirm sightings of Flesh-footed, Fluttering, Sooty, and Hutton's (one only) Shearwater, Westland Petrel, some Prions, and Spotted Shags. It was only a few minutes drive from the dock to our accommodation in Picton.

Day 8

Monday 10th November

QUEEN CHARLOTTE SOUND – KAIKOURA

Weather: Generally fine with a cool wind

After breakfast we boarded the twin-hulled charter boat *Delphinus* for a cruise on Queen Charlotte Sound, the main objective for the trip being to see King Shags, a very rare (estimated population 650) species found only in the Marlborough Sounds. On our way down the sound we saw numerous Fluttering Shearwaters and a number of Australasian Gannets, while two Fairy Prions provided us with some excellent viewing when they landed on the water and most unusually swam to within about 20 metres of the vessel. There was also a pod of three Dusky Dolphins.

In the Queen Charlotte Sound area King Shags previously nested on the isolated and exposed White Rocks near the entrance to the sound from Cook Strait, but again this year we found some nesting on the southern end of Blumine Island. Here we found a total of 41 adults and 5 juvenile as well as a seeing a Weka (an endemic flightless rail) working its way about the nesting area.

From Blumine Island we headed north-west across to the increasingly choppy waters to Cape Jackson where we recorded three Fluttering Shearwaters and a Giant Petrel. We then headed to Ship Cove, a pleasant bay which had been visited on five occasions by Captain James Cook during his three visits to New Zealand. Here we found five Weka (one a chick), some Variable Oystercatchers, Pied Shags, Black-backed and Red-billed Gulls, and White-fronted Terns. On the way back to Picton we encountered two more groups of Dusky Dolphins and one of three Bottle-nosed Dolphins.

After lunch in Picton we headed southwards towards Kaikoura. Two short side trips were made. The first was to near the Blenheim sewerage ponds where we obtained excellent views of a Glossy Ibis and two Black-fronted Dotterel plus the expected Pied Stilt and Spur-winged Plover. Later we visited Lake Grassmere where we found a dearth of wading birds apart from some Pied Stilts, two Banded Dotterel, and some distant Spur-winged Plovers that were associating with a number of Grey Teal, Paradise Shelduck, Mallards and Black Swan. A Caspian Tern also flew by.

We made a stop at Oahu Point where we were able to look down on a colony of New Zealand Fur Seals. Once hunted almost to extinction, seal numbers have recovered well and are continuing to increase. Most of the individuals we could see were young males; adult bulls and females not yet having returned. Nearby was a colony of Spotted Shags, nesting on a cliff face.

The small settlement of Kaikoura has as a backdrop the Seaward Kaikoura Range which rises from the sea to heights of over 2,600 metre, and our accommodation (Alpine View Motel) was aptly named.

Day 9

Tuesday 11th November

KAIKOURA

Weather: Fine, sunny and warm

Off Kaikoura the continental shelf drops abruptly very close to shore, the resultant upwellings of nutrients from the sea's depths attracting whales, seals, dolphins, and a prolific seabird population. The latter was our target for the morning when, along with 17 others, including a party of 12 from another tour, we embarked on what has been described by some as "arguably the best short pelagic tour in the world" – the Albatross Encounter with Ocean Wings. We were not to be disappointed! Because one of the vessels was only permitted to carry 10 passengers and we had two leaders we were asked to split the party into two groups, one on each of the vessels.

With the aid of some "chum" a wide selection of seabirds were viewed at a distance of just a few metres. The species seen were Northern Royal Albatross, Wandering Albatross, New Zealand White-capped, Salvins, and Subantarctic Black-browed Mollymawk (Albatross), Giant Petrel (only Northern subspecies identified), Westland Petrel, Cape Pigeon (both races), Hutton's Shearwater (a local speciality which breeds only high up in the Kaikoura mountains), Sooty Shearwater, Flesh-footed Shearwater, Grey-faced Petrel, and a somewhat out of season Antarctic Fulmar. Then there were Pied Shag, Little Shag, White-fronted Tern, and Black-backed and Red-billed Gulls. As a bonus we also got to see several pods of Dusky Dolphin, a feeding New Zealand Fur Seal, and eight Hector's Dolphins (the smallest marine dolphin in the world and, with an estimated population of 7,400, one of the rarest dolphins in the world). All too soon everyone was back on dry land.

In the afternoon most members of the party undertook the optional whale watching trip on which they saw Sperm Whales and a number of Dusky Dolphins.

Day 10

Wednesday 12th November

KAIKOURA – ARTHUR'S PASS – HOKITIKA

Weather: Fine and sunny to start; overcast to finish

Today was a long driving day to the west coast. Near Cheviot we stopped at St. Anne's Lagoon, a small wildfowl refuge containing a lake and pleasant woodland. Here we added Cape Barren Geese to our list and everyone had excellent views of a Shining Cuckoo. From Cheviot the route took us through the rolling pastoral countryside and vineyards of North Canterbury and then out on to the Canterbury Plains where we passed through towns with familiar names such as Amberley and Oxford.

Lunch was a picnic overlooking the Waimakariri River near where it emerges from its gorge and from where we could clearly see its braided nature downstream. Braided rivers are a feature of the eastern South Island. Found only in New Zealand, northern India, Tibet, Siberia, Alaska and Argentina – mountainous, glaciated places where gravel production, river flows and gentle gradients allow them to form – they have two notable features. Firstly, they have an ever-changing nature as channels form and reform as a consequence of freshes and floods; and secondly, they have unique plant and animal communities. At first glance they look desolate arid places, but in fact their wide shingle beds, numerous snaking water channels and highly variable flows, provide a unique habitat for species such as including Black Stilt, Wrybill, Black-fronted Tern, and Black-billed Gull. Unfortunately braided rivers are under serious threat from weed invasion, introduced predators, and the impact of past (and proposed) hydro-electric developments. We would see some notable examples of this later in the trip.

The road through Arthur's Pass is the highest and most spectacular of the roads through the Southern Alps. Once we had passed over Porters Pass (945 metres), the road ran through tussock-covered basins hemmed by snow-capped mountains and past dramatic limestone outcrops.

At Lake Pearson we were able to view Australasian Crested Grebe, although not as closely as we would have wished. A threatened species in New Zealand, the Australasian Crested Grebe is a subspecies of the Great Crested Grebe of Europe and Britain.

At the eastern edge of Arthur's Pass National Park (at c.100,000 hectares, the sixth largest in New Zealand) the road entered mountain beech dominant forest. At Arthur's Pass village we came upon our first Kea. Usually described as the only mountain parrot in the world, Kea actually prefer to live at the timberline rather than in the true alpine zone. Mostly herbivorous, feeding on berries and shoots, many have learnt to fossick through refuse dumps and eat carrion and scraps. Some have also been recorded as having a preference for fat – be it around sheep kidneys or the stomach oil and subcutaneous fat of Hutton's Shearwater chicks! A gregarious species, it is usually seen in family groups although flocks of mainly juvenile and sub-adult males are often seen about ski-field car parks and refuse dumps. Playful and inquisitive (often the sign of a superior intelligence in animals), they can quickly become destructive, soon making themselves unwelcome especially around tents, cars and ski-fields.

Once we were over the pass (924 metres asl), we commenced commencing the downhill plunge through mainly podocarp forest to the Tasman coast, spotting several Weka along the roadside as we went. After a brief stop for fuel for the bus, and ice creams for ourselves we continued on our way to Greymouth and then north to Punakaiki where we visited the extraordinary “Pancake Rocks” - 30 million year old formations of weathered stratified limestone which resemble stacked pancakes. The short walk also afforded us with excellent views of blowholes, the impressive coast, and the inland ranges behind Punakaiki. We then returned to Greymouth and continued on to our hotel in Hokitika.

Day 11

Thursday 13th November

HOKITIKA – LAKE MOERAKI

Weather: Some showers to start, then generally fine but partly cloudy

Our route today took us down one of the country's outstanding scenic highways. Nowhere else in New Zealand is there the same combination of high snowy mountains, forest-fringed lakes, bouldery rivers, hills formed by terminal and lateral moraines left behind from the last ice age, and primeval forests. As we crossed the bridge over the Hokitika River we spotted a White Heron standing on the edge of one of the channels.

The first stop for the day was at Lake Mahinapua, a pretty stretch of water surrounded by forest and with a backdrop of distant mountains, where we quickly obtained our first views of the endemic Brown Creeper. Our next stop was at Lake Ianthe, a forest-encircled glacial lake, where we managed some closer views of Australasian Crested Grebe. We made a detour to visit Okarito Lagoon, the largest unmodified tidal lagoon in South Island, only to find that as it was high tide there were no birds of interest to be seen.

The cloud was low over the head of the Franz Josef Glacier as we past but we could see the lower portion and tongue. While not the largest in the country, it and the nearby Fox Glacier are considered by many to be the most spectacular. Like all glaciers around the world it has receded dramatically since the middle of the 19th century. Over the last twenty or so years though it has had several periods where it has advanced as a result of large snowfalls in its high basin. Mainly because of their steepness, both the Franz Josef and Fox Glaciers have a rapid (for a glacier) average velocity of 2-3 metres per day (in 1966 the Franz Josef was recorded as moving at the phenomenal rate of 7 metres a day!).

Continuing our way south we turned right at the township of Fox Glacier, and headed to a picnic site known as ‘Mountain View’, where we ate our picnic lunch with the lower Fox Glacier appearing below the clouds as a backdrop.

Given our desire to visit Munro Beach in search of Fiordland Crested Penguins today, thereby easing the following programme for the following day, we then headed to Wilderness Lodge at Lake Moeraki. Having checked in and deposited our bags in our rooms, we were very soon off walking through luxuriant coastal forest towards Monro Beach. After a walk of about 40 minutes we emerged onto a sandy cove bordered by low cliffs. Shortly after we reached the beach a Fiordland Crested Penguins (one of the rarest penguins in the world) appeared at the far end of the beach. We then made our way back to the lodge for dinner.

Day 12

Friday 14th November

LAKE MOERAKI – TWIZEL

Weather: Misty at first then fine, sunny and very warm

Most were woken at 05:00 by the local alarm clock – a Kea that walked along outside the rooms calling loudly!

At 06:30 ten members of the party started their day with a misty dawn kayaking trip up the river to Lake Moeraki. Our first stop of the day was at Ship Creek where a hard surface track and boardwalk allowed us to walk through part of a swamp forest rich in mosses and ferns in which we saw, amongst other things, a wonderful specimen of New Zealand's tallest native tree, the Kahikatea. Kahikatea (or White Pine) can reach a height of more than 60 metres and live for well over 500 years. A member of the ancient Podocarp family (characterised by seed suspended on a fleshy "foot") Kahikatea date back to the time of dinosaurs in the Jurassic Age of some 160-180 million years ago. As a consequence they are sometimes referred to as "the dinosaur tree". Once spread across most fertile lowlands throughout the country they were extensively logged for their odourless, resin-free timber which made ideal butter and cheese boxes and also cleared for to make way for dairy farming. Today extensive stands are found only in south Westland, where some 9,800 hectares are protected as part of the South-West New Zealand Te Waipounamu World Heritage Area.

Ship Creek (so named because wreckage from the Schomberg, a clipper than was wrecked in Victoria, Australia in 1854, was subsequently found here), marks the northern boundary of the 50km long Haast coastal plain, which is the largest area of coastal alluvial land in New Zealand still in a predominantly natural condition. It is also noted for the abundance of Pingao (*Desmoschoenus spiralis*), the golden sand sedge. Once common on active sand dunes throughout New Zealand, Pingao is the sole member of the *Desmoschoenus* genus and has no close relatives. Usually found on the seaward faces of coastal foredunes it is capable of growing closer to the shoreline than any other sand binder. Formerly widely distributed and abundant around the coastline of mainland New Zealand, Stewart Island and the Chatham Islands, it has declined dramatically since European settlement and is now patchily distributed, and often still in decline. The decline of the species was initially a consequence of widespread burning, and browsing and trampling by domestic stock and wild animals such as goats, possums and rabbits. The decline was then accelerated by competition from introduced plants, particularly the aggressive introduced marram grass, which was widely planted for dune stabilisation.

Just after crossing the Haast River on the longest single-lane bridge in New Zealand, we had some Kaka fly over the road just ahead of us. Then it was inland along the Haast Pass Highway, passing through extensive Kamahi and then Silver Beech dominated forest and some impressive mountain scenery. A stop at Thunder Creek Falls enable us to take a short walk through Kamahi and Silver Beech forest to view an impressive 28 metre high waterfall.

At Haast Pass (563 m above sea level, and the lowest of the three road passes linking Westland with the eastern side of South Island) we stopped to walk along another forest track in search of yet another endangered species, the Yellowhead. Once widespread throughout South Island, this insectivorous species has declined because of forest destruction and predation by stoats and rats. Today though we were out of luck, with the forest being all but silent. We did however see some Riflemen (at 8cm in length, the country's smallest bird), also finding their nesting site high in an old silver beech tree.

A short time later we tried for Yellowhead along the Cameron Flat – Blue Pools Track, again without success, although we did find Riflemen aplenty as well see New Zealand Pigeon, Tui, Brown Creeper, Bellbird, Grey Warbler, and several Red Admiral butterflies.

After lunch in a café at Makarora, we continued our way down the Makarora River valley, around the shores of Lakes Wanaka and Hawea, into Central Otago, and over the Lindis Pass into the Mackenzie Country of inland Canterbury. As we travelled the mountains and forests were gradually replaced by open hills covered in tussocks and low (mostly introduced) shrubs. Brightly coloured Russell lupins became more and more common along the roadside and on the braided river beds. While much enjoyed by visitors these colourful plants are, along with introduced predators such as stoats, ferrets, hedgehogs and rats, a very serious threat to the sustainability of the braided river habitat and the native birds that nest there. Our hotel for the next two nights was in Twizel.

Day 13

Saturday 15th November

TWIZEL - AORAKI/MOUNT COOK NATIONAL PARK – TWIZEL

Weather: Fine, sunny and warm with a strong NW wind

Our first stop of the day was at the Ohau Delta on the shores of the uppermost of the three hydro-electric lakes (Lake Benmore) on the Waitaki River. It was a long holiday weekend in Canterbury and there campers, boaties, and anglers were out in force. After trying unsuccessfully to find Marsh Crake we travelled first to Lake Poaka beside the Pukaki – Ohau Canal where we found again there were campers and anglers aplenty, but a dearth of birds.

We then headed for our main objective for the day, Aoraki/Mount Cook National Park, first making a photo stop at the bottom of Lake Pukaki from where could see the distant peaks of Aoraki/Mount Cook National Park albeit somewhat hazily through a great cloud of pollen that was being blown off the large stands of planted and wilding introduced pine trees that clad much of the lake shore. As we drove up the side of the turquoise waters of Lake Pukaki, Aoraki/Mount Cook (at 3,050m, the highest mountain in New Zealand) dominated the view.

By the Glentanner airstrip at the head of the lake we went out on to the bed of the Tasman River where we were quickly presented with some great views of an adult Black Stilt, the rarest wading bird in the world! After several minutes we realised that another was sitting in a hollow close by, and then a while later that there were also two immature/juvenile birds close by. In the C19th Black Stilts bred on the braided shingle riverbeds and associated wetlands in the lower North Island and all of South Island other than Fiordland. In the 1930s and 40s it was still common in lowland South Canterbury, Central Otago and the Mackenzie Country of Canterbury. Since about 1960 though breeding has been confined to the Mackenzie country where they now bred only in the upper Waitaki system. The decline of the species is attributed to predation by introduced mammals (especially cats and ferrets), loss of habitat (mainly through hydro-electric development, but also as a result of the spread of introduced plants (weeds) such as lupins and willows), and hybridisation with the more recently arrived Pied Stilt. By 1981 its population had reached a low of just 23 adult birds. As a result of conservation efforts their numbers had increased to 55 adults, including 11 pairs. Today the population has reached a total of c.120-140 birds, but fewer than 20 breeding pairs.

From the roadend at White Horse Hill we commenced our walk up the Hooker Valley Track. One of the most popular walks in the national park, this track leads up the Hooker Valley towards Aoraki/Mount Cook first to a viewpoint over the lake formed at the receding face of the Mueller Glacier, then over a suspension bridge across the Hooker River, round a bluff, across another suspension bridge and then beside the river to its source at the Hooker Glacier terminal lake. Six of the party went as far as the second bridge while the other 12 went right to the terminal lake where the wind was so strong that it was difficult to stand. The spectacular “Mount Cook Lily” (more accurately *Ranunculus lyalli*, the largest buttercup in the world) was just starting to flower and this added to the interest along the way. After the walk we adjourned to the café in the ‘Hermitage’ hotel prior to returning to Twizel.

Day 14

Sunday 16th November

TWIZEL – INVERCARGILL – STEWART ISLAND

Weather: Mainly fine and sunny

After retracing our route as far as Tarras we then headed off into new country as we made our way through the Kawarau River gorge to the historic gold mining town of Arrowtown where we had lunch. We then headed south down the side of Lake Wakatipu with its impressive backdrop of the Remarkables - a truly impressive range of Mountains that rise almost sheer from close to the lake edge. South of the lake we stopped at Fairlight to view and photograph the “Kingston Flyer”, a restored steam engine that takes tourists on trips along the short section of remaining railway track. The further south of Lake Wakatipu we travelled the greener the countryside became and more and more livestock were seen on sheep, dairy and deer farms.

In Invercargill we visited the Southland Museum where we viewed the Tuatara display. The museum is part of a Tuatara breeding programme which aims to re-introduce these unusual reptiles to some offshore islands. Tuatara have a lineage that dates back 200 million years, and while superficially like lizards are unique in the world of reptiles as the sole survivors of this ancient order. A number of specimens are on display, the most impressive being “Henry” who is believed to have been hatched about 1880!

At Invercargill Airport we were split between two 9-passenger Brittan Norman Islander aircraft for the 20 minute flight to Stewart Island. Oban, Stewart Island’s only settlement, is picturesquely situated around the shores of the Halfmoon Bay. The waters of the bays are clear and green, and most houses are tucked away amongst the native forest. Tui, Bellbirds, Pigeons and Kaka were a feature around the town and a number of brightly coloured Redpolls were seen feeding on the lawns. We were quickly installed in the motels attached to the century old South Seas Hotel where we later ate an excellent meal - delicious locally caught Blue Cod being the choice of most.

Just after 21:00 hrs we were aboard Wildfire, a sturdy 16.5 metre vessel skippered by Philip Smith who is licensed to conduct commercial kiwi viewing trips to a peninsula on the eastern side of Paterson Inlet. As we sailed out of Halfmoon Bay we saw our first Stewart Island Shags roosting on an offshore rock. After Little Glory Bay we were ferried ashore in a dinghy and then made our way as silently as possible along a track through the low forest to Ocean Beach. All torches apart from Philip’s were then switched off and we made our way along the beach.

Towards the southern end Philip located a bird feeding amongst some seaweed on the beach and a few minutes later we were watching a male Stewart Island Brown Kiwi (Southern Tokoeka) by diffused torchlight from a distance of 10-15 metres. The bird appeared to be completely oblivious to us and kept feeding voraciously, probing deeply into the sand with its long, ivory-coloured bill.

Kiwis are the smallest members of the ratites, a group of flightless birds which includes the rheas of South America, the cassowaries of Australia and New Guinea, and the ostriches of Africa. Endemic to New Zealand and ancient in origin, they are unique in both appearance and behaviour. Largely nocturnal, they burrow in the ground, have long tactile whiskers, loose hair-like feathers, nostrils at the end of its bill (the only bird known to) with which they sniffs out food, sharp hearing but poor eyesight. It also has one of the largest egg-to-body weight ratios of any bird, a long incubation period, and low body temperature more akin to a mammal. Females are larger than males; they live in pairs, and mate for life, sometimes as long as 30 years. Most populations are under threat, especially from introduced predators.

The Stewart Island subspecies though is abundant having an estimated population of some 20,000; almost certainly the result of there being no mustelids (stoats, ferrets, weasels) on the island. Omnivorous, they are known to eat earthworms, invertebrates, freshwater crayfish, berries, seeds, snails, slugs, spiders, and grasses. Whereas kiwis are usually nocturnal, on Stewart Island the species is diurnal, often foraging by day. This behaviour is not entirely understood, but has been attributed to either a need for the species to forage longer on poorer food supplies in order to reach breeding condition, or in order to maintain their energy requirements in a colder climate. Whereas the 70-85 day incubation is usually left entirely to the male, Stewart Island birds share it, often aided by previous offspring. Kiwi chicks in the wild leave the nest at one week of age. The hatching process is long and arduous, taking two to three days from the time the chick begins to break out; because the chick lacks an egg tooth, it must kick its way out of the shell with its. When the chick emerges at last with damp feathers, its yolk sack is still connected and nourishes it for several days. A miniature version of its parents, it is able to follow them on their feeding trips within a few days. After leaving the bird we made our way north along the beach where we had brief encounters with both a large female and a male kiwi before returning to the boat.

Back in Halfmoon Bay about 00:40, we were soon in our beds knowing that we had seen a sight most New Zealanders (who pride themselves in being known as Kiwis) have never seen.

Day 15

Monday 17th November

ULVA ISLAND – PATERSON INLET – FOVEAUX STRAIT

Weather: Mainly fine to begin, but some scattered showers and a strong cool breeze later

After our late night we enjoyed the luxury of a very short lie-in and at 09:30 hrs were back on board Wildfire again, this time for a visit to Ulva Island and a short pelagic trip into Foveaux Strait. On reaching Ulva Island we discovered that a visiting cruise vessel had put at least 60 passengers ashore so reversed our plans for the day.

Heading out into Foveaux Strait we passed tiny Whero Rock (on which Dr Lance Richdale lived for several months at a time during his pioneering research into shearwaters and petrels in the 1930s), Bench Island (where we saw a Fiordland Crested Penguin in the water, had White-capped Mollymawks flying very close by, and Brown Skua hovering low overhead).

On Bunker Islets where we found two Yellow-eyed Penguin (yet another endangered endemic species which, while in decline on South and Stewart Islands, is possibly just holding its own in its main population on Auckland Islands). Some Giant Petrels (one of which was clearly of the northern race) were also seen.

Making our way back to Ulva Island we found that everyone was back on board the cruise ship so, after eating our packed lunches, we headed ashore. This was a particularly satisfying sighting as the Yellow-eyed Penguin is an endangered endemic species. While still in decline on South and Stewart Islands, it is possibly holding its own in its main population on Auckland Islands. This season 31 out of 32 chicks monitored on Stewart Island had died of as yet unknown causes. Ulva Island, like Tiritiri Matangi, is an open sanctuary. Introduced rats and Brush-tail Possums having been cleared from the island, and a number of bird species transferred to it since 2000. The removal of rats and mice has also meant that the natural regeneration of the forest can continue undisturbed.

During our time ashore we strolled along several well-maintained hard surface tracks. The weather and later time seemed to have had effect on the birdlife in that for much of the time the forest was strangely lacking in birdsong. Despite this Weka were seen on the beach when we arrived; Robins were absurdly tame, approaching to within inches of us; several Brown Creeper were seen working their way through the trees; Bellbirds, Tui, Kaka, Fantails, Tomtits and Red-crowned Parakeets were both seen and heard. Then, along the track from Boulder Beach, a brilliantly coloured male Yellowhead was seen briefly, but clearly, by the party's 'rearguard'.

For the botanically minded there were some flowering Greenhood Orchids (*Pterostylis* sp), Spider Orchids (*Corybus* sp), and the epiphytic Bamboo orchid (*Earina mucronata*) and Lady's Slipper (*Wiwika cunninghamii*); several patches of *Tmesipteris tannensis* and Lanternberry (*Luzuriaga parviflora*). The latter two have ancient origins, the former being a spore-producing plant believed to have descended from a group of primitive early land plants known only from fossils dating back about 400 million years in the fossil record, while Lanternberry is a mere youngster with a history of only about 100 million years.

That evening we enjoyed a splendid meal at the Church hill Café which, as its name suggests, is situated on a hill above the bay.

Day 16

Tuesday 18th November

STEWART ISLAND – TE ANAU DOWNS

Weather: Overcast and showers (some heavy) in morning; fine in afternoon. Strong, cool westerly wind

A relatively early start was needed this morning to catch our 08:30 flight back to Invercargill. After a stop for some T-shirt buying we headed westwards towards Fiordland National Park. Because of the weather stops were few and brief, the main one being at a viewpoint overlooking Tewaewae Bay where, unfortunately, clouds obscured the views to Stewart Island and Fiordland. Lunch in Te Anau was followed by 1½ hours free time while Wynston and Geoff fuelled the vehicle and purchased items for the following day's lunch. Most took the opportunity to partake in some "retail therapy". A mid-afternoon arrival at our accommodation at Te Anau Downs c.30 km to the north meant that everyone had some more free time; most choosing to stroll around the adjacent Lake Mistletoe Walk. .

Day 17

Wednesday 19th November

MILFORD SOUND RETURN

Weather: Showers to begin, steady rain and sleet at times by the middle of the day, clearing to partly cloudy mid-afternoon

After an early breakfast we set off from Te Anau Downs at 08:15 for our journey through part of Fiordland National Park to Milford Sound. With an area of 1.2 million hectares, Fiordland is New Zealand's largest national park. It forms part the South-West New Zealand Te Waipounamu World Heritage Area and is noted for its spectacular scenery that features glacially gouged valleys, snowy mountains, magnificent forests, lakes, and hundreds of waterfalls. Its western coast consists of fourteen fiords carved by glaciers during successive ice ages.

Relatively few parts of Fiordland are easily accessible, the road to Milford Sound providing the most ready access. As a result it attracts some 400,000 visitors each year, most of whom travel in the many coaches that thunder down the road in a seemingly mad rush to get to Milford Sound in time for their scheduled cruises and lunch. Our journey, on the other hand, was quite leisurely.

Our first stop was at the aptly named Mirror Lakes which provide wonderful reflective views of the adjacent Earl Mountains. Here we had some excellent views of New Zealand Scaup and became reacquainted with the southern beeches.

At Knobs Flat where we used the facilities and looked at the interpretation panels explaining some of the ecological dynamics of the beech forest and the history of the construction of the road to Milford Sound. The former proved rather gloomy in that it was yet another example of an ecological tragedy caused by the ill-considered introduction of alien species. Southern beeches naturally seed (mast) prolifically every few years - when they do, the increased supply of seeds results in a massive increase in mice numbers which in turn leads to similar increases in the rat and then stoat populations. When the food runs out rats and stoats turn their attentions to native birds, especially Yellowheads and Yellow-crowned Parakeets, both of which are particularly vulnerable in that they nest in holes with only one entrance/exit. Further, in the case of Yellowheads only the females incubate the eggs, with the result that more females are lost. More recently the situation has worsened in that climate changes have resulted in beech masts occurring more frequently (sometimes even in consecutive years), with the result that the rat and stoat populations have remained high and the birds have had no respite from predation. In many areas, including our next stop, Cascade Creek, the Yellowhead has been completely eliminated.

At Cascade Creek we wandered around the track through some impressive tall Red Beech forest. Gaining an impression of a forest as it shouldn't be - the impacts of rats and stoats being very much evidenced by a general lack of birdsong. From Cascade Creek the road climbed up and over The Divide (531 metres), the lowest east-west pass in the Southern Alps, before dropping down into the upper Hollyford valley. At the eastern portal of Homer Tunnel we found three Keas entertaining those who stopped by sitting on the roofs of vehicles, inspecting cars and camper vans for any removable items such as rubber seal and windscreen blades, and being generally on the lookout for any food. While mostly herbivorous (70 to 96 per cent according to different researchers), Kea are opportunistic and omnivorous also eating insects, grubs, worms and eggs.

It has been estimated that, in their natural environment, Kea spend up to at least 70 per cent of their active time searching for food. Unfortunately many birds have found that fat and protein can be more effectively and quickly obtained humans – be it from a rubbish dump, a meat pie at a ski-field canteen, or someone who attracts them by offering sandwiches or biscuits. Playful and inquisitive (often the sign of a superior intelligence in animals), they can quickly become destructive, soon making themselves unwelcome especially around tents, cars and ski-fields – a situation exacerbated by the extra time that they find themselves with as a result of the easy food sources so readily made available by humans.

Our principal purpose here was to search for Rock Wren, the only true alpine-dwelling bird in New Zealand and, like the Rifleman, of ancient origins and having no close affinity to any other group of birds. Weak fliers, they spend their time amongst scree or rock falls interspersed with areas of low shrubs. They remain on their territory all year, either feeding under the snow-cover or secreting themselves in a crevice and entering a state of torpor during the winter. We walked the Nature Trail in steady rain and then just as it heavy sleet began to fall we found one! A male appeared on a rock within a couple of meetings of Wynston and then provided everyone with excellent views as it moved around feeding.

Returning to the The Divide we ate our lunch under shelter and then drove back to and then through the 1.2 km Homer Tunnel before descending through a series of hairpin bends to Milford Sound. On arrival we were greeted by the sight of 30 or so coaches awaiting the arrival of their passengers back from early afternoon boat cruises. Our arrival had been timed to perfection, as we merely waited for the multitudes to disembark and disappear into their vehicles and then boarded our boat with very few others.

The cruise provided an excellent appreciation of the size and grandeur of Milford Sound (more accurately a fiord) with wonderful views of towering vertical cliffs, snow-capped peaks and tumbling waterfalls. From a species aspect though it was quite uneventful apart from some Black-backed and Red-billed Gulls and a close look at a few recumbent seals.

On the return journey we stopped to do the short walk to “The Chasm” – an impressive series of waterfalls in a rock chasm formed by the rushing waters of the Cleddau River and many tumbling waterfalls. Then there were the views of two Fiordland Crested Penguins and some recumbent New Zealand Fur Seals.

After dinner we travelled back up the Milford Road to a site where we heard and then obtained a brief view of a Morepork as it flew across the road. As compensation though, we also saw Long-tailed Bats flying above the canopy.

Day 18

Thursday 20th November

TE ANAU DOWNS – DUNEDIN – TAIAROA HEAD - DUNEDIN

Weather: Fine and sunny after a frost. Moderate SE wind in Dunedin

Driving east from Te Anau we passed coach after coach full of people heading for Milford Sound for the lunch time sailings.

In our direction though, the road was all but empty and we made good time past deer farms, an extensive Red Tussock reserve, the Takahe Rearing Unit at Burwood Bush (site of a captive rearing programme involving the incubation of eggs taken from the wild, the hand rearing of chicks using a puppet glove resembling a Takahe, and the eventual release of the birds into the wild when they reach 1 year of age), much green pastureland, more towns with “mascot statues” (a Red Deer, a giant Brown Trout, and three Shire Horses), and along the “Presidential Highway” (between the towns of Clinton and Gore), to Dunedin. Dunedin, the second largest city on South Island, was originally a Scots settlement and this shows in its name (Dunedin being the ancient Gaelic name for Edinburgh), street and suburb names familiar to all who have visited Edinburgh (e.g. Princes, George, Frederick, Hanover, St Andrew, Waverley, Corstorphine), and a large statue of Robert Burns in the centre of the town.

After dropping our bags and the trailer at the hotel we drove down the Otago Peninsula to Wellers Rock where we boarded the M.V. Monarch. The 1¼ hour cruise took us first past a sandy beach where immature male New Zealand Sea Lions was resting, close to the steep cliffs of Taiaroa Head, and some distance offshore before returning to Wellers Rock. We had some wonderful views of flying Royal Albatross and distant views of nesting and displaying (“gamming”) birds. Other species seen included nesting Royal Spoonbills, Stewart Island and Spotted Shags, Northern Giant Petrel, resting New Zealand Fur Seals, and a large New Zealand Sea Lion stalking young Fur Seals!

On the return journey we followed the road that ran alongside the harbour where White-faced Herons, gulls, ducks and oystercatchers were feeding on the exposed mudflats and little shags were perched on boatsheds.

Day 19

Friday 21st November

HOMEWARD BOUND

Weather: Fine

In the morning most took the opportunity to look around the city centre, visit the magnificent Gothic revival railway station, the Botanic Gardens and/or support the local economy through some last minute “retail therapy”, before we all met for lunch.

After lunch, those that were returning home were driven to the airport by Wynston. As we waited for the boarding call Wynston informed us that during the trip we had travelled some 4,600 kms by coach, undertaken two flights in light aircraft and ten boat trips (including those at Orakei Korako but excluding the Whale Watch one), and seen 6 species of marine mammal, one of only two land mammals native to New Zealand, and 121 species of birds.

Species Lists

Birds

| | Common name | Scientific name | November | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|----|--------------------------------|-------------------------------------|----------|---|---|---|---|---|---|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|
| | | | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 | 13 | 14 | 15 | 16 | 17 | 18 | 19 | 20 |
| 1 | Stewart Island Brown Kiwi | <i>Apteryx australis lawryi</i> | | | | | | | | | | | | | | X | | | | |
| 2 | Little Spotted Kiwi | <i>Apteryx owenii</i> | | X | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 3 | Australasian Crested Grebe | <i>Podiceps cristatus australis</i> | | | | | | | | | | X | X | | | X | | X | | |
| 4 | New Zealand Dabchick | <i>Podiceps rufopectus</i> | | | | X | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 5 | Gibson's (Wandering) Albatross | <i>Diomedea gibsoni</i> | | | | | | | | | X | | | | | | | | | |
| 6 | Northern Royal Albatross | <i>Diomedea epomophora</i> | | | | | | | | | X | | | | | | | | | X |
| 7 | Black-browed Albatross | <i>Diomedea melanophrys</i> | | | | | | | | | X | | | | | | | | | |
| 8 | White-capped (Shy) Albatross | <i>Diomedea cauta steadi</i> | | | | | | | | | X | | | | | | X | | | |
| 9 | Salvin's (Shy) Albatross | <i>Diomedea cauta salvini</i> | | | | | | | | | X | | | | | | | | | |
| 10 | Antarctic Fulmar | <i>Fulmarus glacialisoides</i> | | | | | | | | | X | | | | | | | | | |
| 11 | Giant Petrel | <i>Macronectes sp.</i> | | | | | | | | | X | X | | | | | X | | | |
| 12 | Northern Giant Petrel | <i>Macronectes halli</i> | | | | | | | | | X | | | | | | X | | | X |
| 13 | Cape Pigeon | <i>Daption capense</i> | | | | | | | | | X | | | | | | X | | | |
| 14 | Grey-faced Petrel | <i>Pterodroma macroptera</i> | | | | | | | | | X | | | | | | | | | |
| 15 | Westland Black Petrel | <i>Procellaria westlandica</i> | | | | | | | X | | X | | | | | | | | | |
| 16 | Flesh-footed Shearwater | <i>Puffinus carneipes</i> | | | | | | | X | | X | | | | | | | | | |
| 17 | Sooty Shearwater | <i>Puffinus griseus</i> | | | | | | | X | | X | | | | | | X | | | |
| 18 | Fluttering Shearwater | <i>Puffinus gavia</i> | | | X | | | | X | X | | | | | | | | | | |
| 19 | Hutton's Shearwater | <i>Puffinus huttoni</i> | | | | | | | X | | X | | | | | | | | | |
| 20 | Common Diving Petrel | <i>Pelecanoides urinatrix</i> | | | | | | | X | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 21 | Yellow Eyed Penguin | <i>Megadyptes antipodes</i> | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | X | | | |
| 22 | Blue Penguin | <i>Eudyptula minor iredalei</i> | | X | X | | | | | | X | | | | | | X | | | |
| 23 | Fiordland Crested Penguin | <i>E. pachyrhynchus</i> | | | | | | | | | | | X | | | | X | | X | |
| 24 | Australasian Gannet | <i>Morus serrator</i> | X | | | | | | | | X | X | X | | | | X | | X | |
| 25 | Black Shag (Great Cormorant) | <i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i> | | X | X | X | X | | | | X | | X | X | X | | | | | X |
| 26 | Pied Shag | <i>Phalacrocorax varius</i> | | X | X | X | X | | | | X | X | | | | | X | | | |
| 27 | Little Black Shag | <i>Phalacrocorax sulcirostris</i> | | | | X | X | | | | | | | | | | | X | X | |
| 28 | Little Shag | <i>Phalacrocorax melanoleucos</i> | | X | | X | X | X | X | | X | X | X | | | | | X | | X |
| 29 | King Shag | <i>Leucocarbo carunculatus</i> | | | | | | | | | X | | | | | | | | | |

| | Common name | Scientific name | November | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|----|---------------------------------|------------------------------------|----------|---|---|---|---|---|---|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|
| | | | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 | 13 | 14 | 15 | 16 | 17 | 18 | 19 | 20 |
| 30 | Spotted Shag | <i>Punctatus punctatus</i> | | | | | | | X | X | X | X | | | | | X | | | X |
| 31 | Stewart Island Shag | <i>Leucocarbo chalconotus</i> | | | | | | | | | | | | | | X | X | | | X |
| 32 | White-faced Heron | <i>Ardea novaehollandiae</i> | X | X | X | X | | | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | | | | X |
| 33 | White Heron (Great Egret) | <i>Egretta alba</i> | | | | | | | | | | X | | | | | | | | |
| 34 | Cattle Egret | <i>Bubulcus ibis</i> | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | X | | | |
| 35 | Glossy Ibis | <i>Plegadis falcinellus</i> | | | | | | | | X | | | | | | | | | | |
| 36 | Royal Spoonbill | <i>Platalea regia</i> | | X | | | | | | X | | | | | | | | X | | X |
| 37 | Black Swan | <i>Cygnus atratus</i> | | X | X | X | X | | | X | | X | X | | X | | | | | X |
| 38 | Canada Goose | <i>Branta canadensis</i> | | | X | | X | | X | | | | | | X | | | | | |
| 39 | Cape Barren Goose | <i>Cereopsis novaehollandiae</i> | | | | | | | | | X | | | | | | | | | |
| 40 | Feral Goose | <i>Anser anser</i> | X | X | | X | X | | | | X | | | | | | | | | |
| 41 | Paradise Shelduck | <i>Tadorna variegata</i> | | X | X | X | X | | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | | X | X | X |
| 42 | Mallard | <i>Anas platyrhynchos</i> | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | | X | X | X | X | X | | X | X | X |
| 43 | Grey Duck | <i>Anas superciliosa</i> | | | | ? | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 44 | Grey Teal | <i>Anas gibberifrons</i> | | | | | X | | | X | | X | | | | | | | | X |
| 45 | Brown Teal | <i>Anas. aucklandica</i> | | | | X | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 46 | Australasian Shoveler | <i>Anas rhynchos</i> | | | | X | | | | X | | X | | | | | | | | |
| 47 | Blue Duck | <i>Hymenolaimus malacorhynchos</i> | | | | | | X | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 48 | New Zealand Scaup | <i>Aythya novaeseelandiae</i> | | | | X | X | | | | | X | | X | X | X | | X | X | X |
| 49 | Australasian Harrier | <i>Circus approximans</i> | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| 50 | New Zealand Falcon | <i>Falco novaeseelandiae</i> | | | | | | X | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 51 | Wild Turkey | <i>Meleagris gallopava</i> | X | X | X | | | | X | | | | | | | X | | | | |
| 52 | Brown Quail | <i>Synoicus ypsilophorus</i> | | X | X | X | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 53 | California Quail | <i>Lophortyx californica</i> | | | | | X | | | | | X | | | | | | | | |
| 54 | Pheasant | <i>Phasianus colchicus</i> | X | X | | | | | | | | | | | | | | X | | |
| 55 | Weka | <i>Gallirallus australis</i> | | | | | | | | X | | X | X | | | | | X | | |
| 56 | Spotless Crake | <i>Porzana tabuensis</i> | | | | X | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 57 | Pukeko (Purple Swamphen) | <i>Porphyrio melanotus</i> | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | | | X | X | X | X | X | | | | X |
| 58 | Takahe | <i>Porphyrio mantelli</i> | | | X | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 59 | Australian Coot | <i>Fulica atra australis</i> | | | | | X | | | | | X | | | | | | | | |
| 60 | South Island Pied Oystercatcher | <i>Haematopus ostralegus</i> | | X | | | | | | | | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| 61 | Variable Oystercatcher | <i>Haematopus unicolor</i> | X | X | X | | | | X | X | X | X | | | | X | X | X | X | X |

| | Common name | Scientific name | November | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|----|----------------------------|-------------------------------------|----------|---|---|---|---|---|---|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|---|
| | | | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 | 13 | 14 | 15 | 16 | 17 | 18 | 19 | 20 | |
| 62 | Spur-winged Plover | <i>Vanellus miles</i> | X | X | X | X | X | | | X | X | | X | X | X | X | X | | X | X | X |
| 63 | New Zealand Dotterel | <i>Charadrius obscurus</i> | | X | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 64 | Banded Dotterel | <i>Charadrius bicinctus</i> | | | | | | | | X | X | | | | X | X | | | | | |
| 65 | Black-fronted Dotterel | <i>Charadrius melanops</i> | | | | | | | | | X | | | | | | | | | | |
| 66 | Wrybill | <i>Anarhynchus frontalis</i> | | X | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 67 | Eastern Bar-tailed Godwit | <i>Limosa lapponica</i> | | X | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 68 | Turnstone | <i>Arenaria interpres</i> | | X | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 69 | Knot | <i>Calidris canutus</i> | | X | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 70 | Sharp-tailed Sandpiper | <i>Calidris acuminata</i> | | X | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 71 | Pied Stilt | <i>Himantopus himantopus</i> | | X | X | X | | | | | | X | X | X | | X | X | X | | | X |
| 72 | Black Stilt | <i>Himantopus novaeseelandiae</i> | | | | | | | | | | | | | X | | | | | | |
| 73 | Southern Black-backed Gull | <i>Larus dominicanus</i> | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| 74 | Red-billed Gull | <i>Larus novaehollandiae</i> | X | X | X | X | X | | X | X | X | X | X | X | | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| 75 | Black-billed Gull | <i>Larus bulleri</i> | | X | | X | | | | | | X | | | X | X | | X | | | X |
| 76 | Brown Skua | <i>Catharacta skua</i> | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | X | X | | | |
| 77 | Arctic skua | <i>Stercorarius parasiticus</i> | | | | | | X | | X | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 78 | Caspian Tern | <i>Hydroprogne caspia</i> | | | | X | | | | X | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 79 | Black-fronted Tern | <i>Sterna albobriata</i> | | | | | | | | | | X | | X | X | X | | X | | | X |
| 80 | White-fronted Tern | <i>Sterna striata</i> | X | X | X | | | | | | X | X | X | X | | | X | | | | X |
| 81 | New Zealand Pigeon | <i>Hemiphaga novaeseelandiae</i> | | X | X | | X | X | X | | | X | X | X | | X | X | X | X | X | |
| 82 | Rock Pigeon | <i>Columba livia</i> | X | X | X | X | | X | | | | X | X | X | | | | | | | X |
| 83 | Spotted Dove | <i>Streptopelia chinensis</i> | X | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 84 | Kaka | <i>Nestor meridionalis</i> | | | | | X | | | | | | X | | X | X | | | X | | |
| 85 | Kea | <i>Nestor notabilis</i> | | | | | | | | | | X | X | | | | X | | | | |
| 86 | Eastern Rosella | <i>Platycercus eximius</i> | | X | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | X | |
| 87 | Red-crowned Parakeet | <i>Cyanoramphus novaeseelandiae</i> | | X | X | X | | | | | | | | | | | X | | | | |
| 88 | Yellow-crowned Parakeet | <i>Cyanoramphus auriceps</i> | | | | | X | | | | | | | | | | | | | | H |
| 89 | Shining Cuckoo | <i>Chrysococcyx lucidus</i> | | | | | X | H | | | | X | | | | | | | | | |
| 90 | Long-tailed Cuckoo | <i>Eudynamys taitensis</i> | | | | | H | | | | | | | H | | | | | | | H |
| 91 | Little Owl | <i>Athene noctua</i> | | | | | | | | | | H | | | | | | | | | |
| 92 | Morepork | <i>Ninox novaeseelandiae</i> | | H | | | | | | | | | X | | | | | | | X | |
| 93 | New Zealand Kingfisher | <i>Halcyon sancta</i> | | X | X | X | H | X | | | | | X | | | | | | | | X |

| | Common name | Scientific name | November | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|-----|-------------------|-------------------------------------|----------|---|---|---|---|---|---|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|
| | | | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 | 13 | 14 | 15 | 16 | 17 | 18 | 19 | 20 |
| 94 | Welcome Swallow | <i>Hirundo tahitica</i> | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | | X | X | X | |
| 95 | Rifleman | <i>Acanthisitta chloris</i> | | | | | | | | | | | X | | | | | | | |
| 96 | Rock Wren | <i>Xenicus gilviventris</i> | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | X | | |
| 97 | Silvereeye | <i>Zosterops lateralis</i> | X | X | | X | X | X | X | X | | X | X | X | | | | X | | |
| 98 | Grey Warbler | <i>Gerygone igata</i> | | H | | | X | X | X | | | X | X | | | | X | X | X | |
| 99 | Skylark | <i>Alauda arvensis</i> | | X | | X | X | X | X | X | | X | X | X | X | X | | X | X | X |
| 100 | New Zealand Pipit | <i>Anthus novaseelandiae</i> | | X | | X | | X | | | | | | | | | X | | X | |
| 101 | Blackbird | <i>Turdus merula</i> | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| 102 | Song Thrush | <i>Turdus philomelos</i> | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| 103 | Dunnock | <i>Prunella modularis</i> | | | | | | X | X | | | X | | X | X | X | | X | | X |
| 104 | Fernbird | <i>Bowdleria punctata</i> | | | | | X | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 105 | Brown Creeper | <i>Mohoua novaseelandiae</i> | | | | | | | | | | | X | X | | | X | | X | |
| 106 | Whitehead | <i>Mohoua albicilla</i> | | X | X | X | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 107 | Yellowhead | <i>Mohoua ochrocephala</i> | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | X | | | |
| 108 | Fantail | <i>Rhipidura fuliginosa</i> | | | | | X | | | | | | X | X | | | X | | X | |
| 109 | Tomtit | <i>Petroica macrocephala</i> | | | | | X | X | | | | | X | X | | | X | | X | |
| 110 | New Zealand Robin | <i>Petroica australis</i> | | | X | X | X | | | | | | X | | | | X | | | |
| 111 | Kokako | <i>Callaeas cinerea</i> | | | | X | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 112 | Stitchbird | <i>Notiomystis cincta</i> | | X | X | X | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 113 | Bellbird | <i>Melanura melanura</i> | | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | | X | X | X | | X | X | X | X | |
| 114 | Tui | <i>Prosthemadura novaseelandiae</i> | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | | | X | X | X | | X | X | X | X | X |
| 115 | Saddleback | <i>Philesturnus carunculatus</i> | | X | X | X | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 116 | House Sparrow | <i>Passer domesticus</i> | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| 117 | Yellowhammer | <i>Emberiza citrinella</i> | X | X | X | | | X | | X | | X | X | X | X | X | | X | X | X |
| 118 | Cirl Bunting | <i>Emberiza cirius</i> | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 119 | Chaffinch | <i>Fringilla coelebs</i> | | | X | X | X | X | X | X | | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| 120 | Greenfinch | <i>Carduelis chloris</i> | | X | X | X | | | | | | X | | | X | | | | X | X |
| 121 | Goldfinch | <i>Carduelis carduelis</i> | | X | | X | X | X | | | | X | X | X | X | X | | X | X | X |
| 122 | Redpoll | <i>Carduelis flammea</i> | | | | | X | | | X | | X | | X | | X | | X | X | X |
| 123 | Starling | <i>Sturnus vulgaris</i> | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| 124 | Indian Myna | <i>Acridotheres tristis</i> | X | X | X | X | X | | X | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 125 | Australian Magpie | <i>Gymnorhina tibicen</i> | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | | X | X | X | X |

| | Common name | Scientific name | November | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|-----|-------------|--------------------------|----------|---|---|---|---|---|---|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|
| | | | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 | 13 | 14 | 15 | 16 | 17 | 18 | 19 | 20 |
| 126 | Rook | <i>Corvus frugilegus</i> | | | | | X | | | | | | | | | | | | | |

Mammals

| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|----|---------------------------------|----------------------------------|---|--|--|--|---|--|---|--|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|--|---|---|
| 1 | New Zealand Fur Seal | <i>Arctocephalus forsteri</i> | | | | | | | | | X | X | X | | | | | X | | X | X |
| 2 | New Zealand (Hooker's) Sea Lion | <i>Phocarcartos hookeri</i> | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | X |
| 3 | Dusky Dolphin | <i>Lagenorhynchus obscurus</i> | | | | | | | | | X | X | X | | | | | | | | |
| 4 | Bottle-nose Dolphin | <i>Tusiops truncatus</i> | | | | | | | | | X | | | | | | | | | | |
| 5 | Hector's Dolphin | <i>Cephalorhynchus hectori</i> | | | | | | | | | | X | X | | | | | | | | |
| 6 | Sperm Whale | <i>Physeter macrocephalus</i> | | | | | | | | | | X | | | | | | | | | |
| 7 | Long-tailed Bat | <i>Chalinolobus tuberculatus</i> | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | X | |
| 8 | Ship Rat | <i>Rattus rattus</i> | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 9 | Brush-tailed Possum | <i>Trichosurus vulpecula</i> | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 10 | Brown Hare | <i>Lepus europaeus</i> | | | | | X | | X | | | | | X | X | | | | | X | |
| 11 | Rabbit | <i>Oryctolagus cuniculus</i> | X | | | | X | | | | | | | X | X | X | X | | | | X |

Other Taxa

| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|----|--------------------------|--------------------------------|--|--|--|--|--|---|---|---|--|--|---|---|---|--|--|--|--|--|--|
| 1 | Blue Damselfly | <i>Austrolestes colensonis</i> | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 2 | Manuka Chafer | <i>Pyronota festiva</i> | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 3 | Nurseryweb Spider | <i>Dolomedes minor</i> | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 4 | Red Admiral Butterfly | <i>Vanessa gonerilla</i> | | | | | | X | X | | | | | X | X | | | | | | |
| 5 | Yellow Admiral Butterfly | <i>V. itea</i> | | | | | | | | | | | X | | | | | | | | |
| 6 | Common Blue Butterfly | <i>Zizina labradus</i> | | | | | | | | | | | | | X | | | | | | |
| 7 | Monarch Butterfly | <i>Donaus plexippus</i> | | | | | | | X | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 8 | Common Copper Butterfly | <i>Lycaena salustius</i> | | | | | | | | X | | | | | X | | | | | | |
| 9 | Magpie Moth | <i>Nyctemera annulata</i> | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 10 | Puriri Moth | <i>Aenetus virescens</i> | | | | | | X | | | | | | X | | | | | | | |
| 11 | New Zealand Grasshopper | <i>Phaulacridium marginale</i> | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 12 | Manuka Chafer | <i>Pyronota festiva</i> | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |

| | Common name | Scientific name | November | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|----|----------------------|-----------------------------------|----------|---|---|---|---|---|---|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|
| | | | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 | 13 | 14 | 15 | 16 | 17 | 18 | 19 | 20 |
| 13 | Nurseryweb Spider | <i>Dolomedes minor</i> | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 14 | Tree Weta | <i>Hemideina sp.</i> | | X | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 15 | New Zealand Flatworm | <i>Arthurdendyus triangulatus</i> | | | | | | | | | X | | | | | | | | | |
| 16 | Carpet Shark | <i>Cephaloscyllium isabellum</i> | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 17 | Bell Frog | <i>Litoria sp.</i> | | X | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 18 | Tunnelling Mud Crab | <i>Helice crassa</i> | | X | | | | | | X | | | | | | | | | | |

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