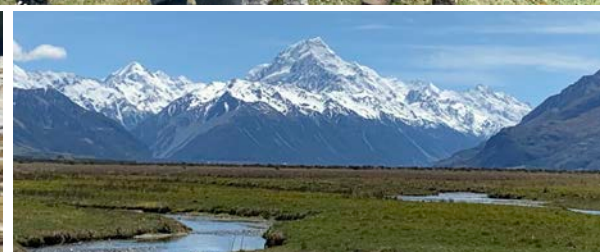
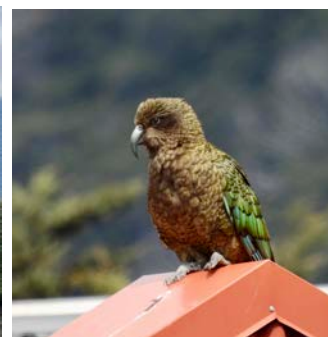


New Zealand Birding & Nature | Oct. 29 – Nov. 16, 2023 | Trip Report | by Pat Lueders



With guides Pat Lueders and Mark Ayre, and participants Husam, Carol, Gail, John, Erica, Ron, Roger, Ruth, John, Pat and Carolyn



Sun., Oct. 29

Welcome to New Zealand | Pre-tour extension

All of the pre-tour participants arrived in Auckland and enjoyed visiting a variety of sites in this lovely city before gathering to begin our adventure. We met Mark at breakfast, packed the bus and drove to Mangere Lagoon, a vast marsh area teeming with birds at low tide. Sighting our first Black Swans, Australasian Swampheens, South Island Oystercatchers, Wrybills, Red-breasted Dotterels, Black-billed Gulls, White-faced Herons and Royal Spoonbills was indeed exciting! We drove north over the impressive Auckland Harbour Bridge and enjoyed the scenic countryside luckily spotting an Australian Fairy Tern, an endangered endemic. We arrived at Warkworth in time for a delicious dinner and our first checklist.



Mon., Oct. 30 Waipu Estuary | Tawharanui Regional Park | Evening Kiwi Viewing

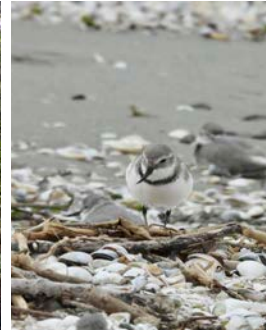
Unfortunately, we awoke to the remnants of Cyclone Nola, so the scheduled pelagic in the Hauraki Gulf was canceled. Instead, we visited the Waipu Estuary adding Variable Oystercatchers, Swamp Harrier, Spotted Dove and Kelp Gull to our rapidly growing list of sightings. After lunch, we walked at Tawharanui Regional Park, finding a pair of the endemic, prehistoric-looking South Island Takahe, the largest living rail in the world, and one of the few places this endangered species can be found! We also saw our first New Zealand Kaka, a large, endemic parrot, Gray Gerygone, Whitehead, New Zealand Fantail, North Island Saddleback and Welcome Swallow. After dinner, we returned to Tawharanui to search for the North Island Brown Kiwi, the only kiwi found in the wild on the North Island. Our young, knowledgeable guide, Ed, had us walk as quietly as possible, since hearing the kiwi scratching is the way to find them. After a short time, he heard one and then helped us see it in the brush foraging for worms. Later, we saw a young kiwi thought to be about two weeks old. What a wonderfully successful evening!

Tue., Oct. 31 Main Tour Begins: Tawharanui Regional Park | Muriwai Gannet Colony | Mangere Lagoon

After breakfast, we made a second visit to the fabulous Tawharanui Regional Park before returning to Auckland. We added Brown Teal, the largest of the three endemic teal species, along with the endemic New Zealand Pigeon, Tui, New Zealand Bellbird and California Quail. We arrived in Auckland to meet the remainder of the group and begin the main tour. The group became acquainted at lunch, then we stopped at the Muriwai Gannet Colony before returning to the Mangere Lagoon, adding Silvereye, European Greenfinch and Eurasian Skylark to the long list of species found here. After our welcome dinner at the Grand Millennium, we slept soundly in anticipation of tomorrow's adventure.

Wed., Nov. 1 Tiritiri Matangi Island

We left Auckland for the Whangaparoa Peninsula and boarded our vessel to Tiritiri Matangi, an island sanctuary in the Hauraki Gulf where endangered endemic species are protected from the ravages of rats, possums and stoats. As we walked the trail, we soon heard the haunting song of the North Island Kokako, then located it as well as the endemic Stitchbird and the North Island Saddleback. Mark surprised us when he pointed out a



roosting Morepork, a small endemic owl. The gift shop was tempting with its delightful variety of souvenirs to purchase. Out on the gulf, we saw shearwaters, White-fronted Terns and Little Pied and Pied Cormorants. What a successful visit to this island sanctuary!

Thur., Nov. 2 Miranda Wildlife Sanctuary | Lake Rotorua

After leaving Auckland, our first stop was the Miranda Wildlife Sanctuary, a huge expanse of shell banks and silt flats that were covered with shorebirds and waders. Pied Stilts, Royal Spoonbills, Red Knots, Bar-tailed Godwits and Whimbrels are spotted from the blind. Mark spotted a rare Whiskered Tern feeding over the water that allowed close views and photos. Numerous Sky Larks conducted their vocal mating display, and Yellowhammers were perched on the reeds. We moved to Ray's Rest and found Wrybills, an endemic plover with a black bill that curves to the right, a Red-neck Stint and hundreds of South Island Oystercatchers.

We enjoyed lunch at the Miranda Pukorokoro Shorebird Headquarters and were treated to a presentation of the work being done there by the director. Quite a few of us also enjoyed shopping in their well-stocked gift shop. We continued to Lake Rotorua, a geothermally active region situated in the central plateau. At the pungent Sulphur Point, we found a small, treed island with nesting Little Pied and Little Black Cormorants. New Zealand Grebe, scaup and a Black Swan with cygnet were swimming nearby. Throughout the area, steam could be seen escaping from this unique volcanic plateau.

Fri., Nov. 3 Pureora Forest Park | Tongariro National Park

We departed Rotorua and stopped at the Whakamaru Dam area. New Zealand's power is 90% hydroelectric, so we would see many dams during our journeys on both islands. At the dam, we spotted our first Eurasian Coot, Masked Lapwings, Australasian Shovelers and Paradise Shelducks. When we arrived at the Pureora Forest Park, we walked the moss and fern-lined trails finding pairs of New Zealand Kaka, an endemic and quite vocal parrot. Tui, Bellbirds, New Zealand Fantails and North Island Robins were plentiful. We stopped at a large marsh area and found an Australasian Bittern perched atop some reeds for good scope looks. The Whakapapanui Stream is a beautiful river where we found a family of four endemic Blue Ducks. Amazing to watch how they handled the strong rapids, effortlessly feeding around the dark blue rocks! Our picturesque lodge was situated at the base of snow-covered mountains and decorated with vintage skis.



Sat., Nov. 4 Waikanae Estuary | Ferry Crossing to South Island

After breakfast, Mark was called to Carol and Husam's room to see a New Zealand Falcon perched outside their window. In route to Wellington and our ferry crossing to the South Island, we stopped at the Waikanae Estuary, and then boarded the Cook Strait Ferry to cross Fitzroy Bay to Pictin. Birding from the cruise ship-sized ferry, we saw our first White-capped Albatross, Cook's and Westland Petrels, many Fairy Prions and Fluttering and Sooty Shearwaters. We checked into our hotel in great anticipation of our pelagic trip in the morning.

Sun., Nov. 5 Queen Charlotte Sound Boat Cruise | Kaikoura

Our cruise of the sound left from the charming Pictin Harbour on a calm, crisp morning, and we immediately found many seabirds including Fluttering Shearwater, Little Penguin and gannets. The rocky cliffs held pairs of the beautiful Spotted Shag and New Zealand King Shag, which is endemic to the Marlborough Sound. We dry-landed on the rocky shore and were greeted by the Weka, a large, flightless rail endemic to the region. Malherbe's Parakeet, another endemic and rather long-tailed parakeet, breeds in this area, and we spotted two pairs, one already nesting. What a beautiful sound with picturesque cliffs jutting into the sea! We had lunch in Pictin and visited some of the shops before departing for Kaikoura. Along the way, we visited Lake Elterwater, a breeding area for the New Zealand "Bird of the Century", the Great-Crested Grebe. We arrived in Kaikoura and enjoyed a delicious dinner just steps from our comfortable lodge.

Mon., Nov. 6 Kaikoura Seabird Cruise

We left after breakfast for our Kaikoura Seabird Cruise, moving through the harbor to the open sea where the continental shelf drops abruptly close to the shore. We saw five species of Albatross: Northern and Southern Royal, huge seabirds of the Southern Ocean, and Antipodean, White-capped, and Salvin's. The Northern Giant-Petrel, Cape Petrel and Westland Petrel joined in the feeding frenzy. Buller's and Sooty Shearwaters and Little Penguin were spotted, and a Pacific Reef-Heron was spotted atop a cliff. In addition to New Zealand Fur Seals, we enjoyed Hector's and Dusky Dolphins following the boat. How exciting to see these iconic bird species and mammals so closely! After lunch we enjoyed some deserved downtime. Some walked to Kaikoura to browse the shops, others did laundry or rested and caught up on their journal entries. Our comfortable hotel was only steps from the shore!



Tue, Nov. 7 Canterbury Plains | Southern Alps

The Canterbury Plains is one of New Zealand's most extensive agricultural regions with green grass fields running from the foothills to the Southern Alps. The scenery as we drove was breathtaking, and Mark shared the history of the area as we traveled. We stopped at the Ashley River Estuary near Christchurch for good looks at the cute Double-Banded Plover and graceful White-fronted Terns. After lunch, we stopped at Lake Lyndon, a nesting area for the Great Crested Grebe. Arthur's Pass is situated along one of the many braided rivers of the eastern South Island. Along the river, we found many endemic Black-fronted Terns that breed along these rivers, gracefully feeding over a plowed field. Our destination, the Wilderness Lodge, is a working sheep farm set amidst a delightful mix of high-country beech forest and tussock lands. Despite some afternoon showers and small hail, we viewed a demonstration of sheep dogs herding the sheep into a circle, observed the shearing of a merino sheep, and watched a two-week-old lamb being bottle-fed. We would enjoy this beautiful lodge and its outstanding meals for two days!

Wed., Nov. 8 Wilderness Lodge | Arthur's Pass Village

After breakfast, we birded the beautiful beech forest, finding our first Tomtits, South Island Robins and many Lesser Redpolls. We went into the quaint Arthur's Pass Village to see the world's only true alpine parrot, the large Kea, found only on the South Island of New Zealand. We found them near the general store. This inquisitive parrot visits the town for attention from visitors, which it readily receives. With many fireplaces to relax around, we spent a delightful afternoon enjoying the lodge and its many amenities.

Thur., Nov. 9 Lake Tekapo | Mackenzie Country

Our early morning walk was quite productive with our first look at the Rifleman, New Zealand's smallest bird, plus Dunnocks, Gray Gerygone, Tomtits and the cute Fantails. Sadly, we had to leave this beautiful lodge, but more adventures awaited us! We watched the expanse of the snow-capped Southern Alps as we traveled south to Lake Murray to find the Black Stilt, a critically endangered endemic that breeds only on the braided rivers of the Mackenzie Basin. It's estimated that only Black Stilts exist in the wild, making it the rarest wading bird in the world. We found two feeding along the shore of the lake and carefully watched and photographed them from a safe distance. We also had good looks at Yellowhammers and Eurasian Skylarks in the fields nearby.



We checked into our hotel in Twizel and marveled at our luck finding the Black Stilts while we enjoyed a delicious dinner and an exciting checklist gathering.

Fri., Nov. 10 Braided Rivers | Mount Cook National Park

We stopped at the Kaki Lagoons finding many Black Swans with cygnets, Masked Lapwings and New Zealand Scaup. Our next stop was the Ohau C Ponds where we enjoyed a nice walk, hearing and then seeing a Shining Bronze-Cuckoo. We also found Yellowhammer, California Quail and Gray Teal. As we continued birding along a braided river in the shadow of Mount Cook, we found two immature Black Stilts, South Island Oystercatchers, many nesting Double-banded Plovers and Black-fronted Terns.

Snow covered Mount Cook, at 12,200 feet, is the highest peak in New Zealand and home to the Tasman Glacier. We had our picnic lunch at the base, keeping an eye out for New Zealand Falcon, which we eventually heard but only saw briefly. A short walk in the forest provided everyone in the group good looks at Rifleman, the tiny endemic and New Zealand's smallest bird, more Tomtits, and Silvereyes. We returned to Twizel to celebrate such a successful day!

Sat., Nov. 11 Central Otago | Ferry to Stewart Island | Kiwi Outing

Today we left the Mackenzie Country, birding our way to Invercargill to cross the Foveaux Strait on the Stewart Island Ferry. At Pleasure Bay, we walked out to Tip Lagoon to see a Northern Pintail, a rare species for New Zealand. Many ducks were in the lagoon including Paradise Shelducks, Australasian Shovelers, Pacific Black Ducks, Gray Teal and New Zealand Scaup. Our short ferry trip was smooth with good looks at Little Penguin, White-capped Albatross, Cape Petrel, Common Diving-Petrel and Stewart Island Shag.

After a delicious dinner at the local Stewart Island pub, we drove to the local airstrip to view the nocturnal feeding behavior of the Southern Brown Kiwi, the largest of New Zealand's kiwis. Our experienced guides walked us out on the runway where, using powerful red lights to sweep the grassy areas for kiwis, they soon located one that was quite close, and we watched it feeding for a length of time. Wow! What a memorable event! Many in the group took videos with our phones and the guides showed us how to convert the red images to black and white. We also heard Moorpork, Long-tailed Koel and New Zealand Kaka calling. Magical!



Sun., Nov. 12 South Pacific Seabirds | Ulva Island

This morning we embarked on a cruise of the breathtaking Paterson Inlet and quickly saw three penguin species: Fiordland Penguins in a cave, and Yellow-eyed and Little Penguins feeding in the bay. A Brown Skua was resting on the water after scattering Southern Royal, White-capped and Salvin's Albatrosses. Northern Giant-Petrel, Cape Petrel, Westland Petrel, Sooty Shearwater and Common Diving-Petrel all followed the boat. On a cliff, we spotted Stewart Island Shags, distinguished from the other shag species by their pink feet. The smooth water surface provided comfortable viewing and great photo opportunities.

After lunch, we took a small boat to Ulva Island to see the endemic Red-crowned Parakeet, restricted to offshore islands of New Zealand. On this lovely walk, we also saw Kakas, Tui, Bellbirds, Yellowhead and Pipipi, a small noisy songbird endemic to New Zealand. We marveled at what wonderful luck we had today when we met to review the checklist after dinner.

Mon., Nov. 13 Departure from Stewart Island | Fiordland National Park

The ferry returned us this morning to Indercargill on the mainland, and we drove north to Fiordland National Park, stopping at various spots along the dramatic, rocky coastline. We had lunch at the Clifden Suspension Bridge and watched Common Chaffinches trying to steal our dessert. We arrived in the charming mountain village of Te Anau with time for shopping in the many unique shops before we met for dinner.

Tue., Nov. 14 Fiordland National Park | Milford Sound

We left this morning for our highly anticipated cruise of Milford Sound. We stopped at the entrance of the National Park at Mirror Lakes, situated at the base of snow-capped mountains, for a group photo. We birded nearby at the Knobs Flat Conservation area and had good looks at Shining Bronze-Cuckoo, Pipipi, South Island Robins and Lesser Redpolls. We had some time to hike along the moss-covered Lake Gunn Nature Walk, marveling at the variety of mosses and orchids.



Then we boarded our Milford Sound ship for our grand finale cruise in the fiords. Unfortunately, the fog and low cloud ceiling detracted some from the dramatic scenery, but we marveled at the numerous waterfalls, the result of the recent rain. What a memorable visit to this unique example of physical geography!

Wed., Nov. 15 Southeastern Coast | Dunedin | Harbor Cruise

We departed Te Anau this morning for Dunedin, New Zealand's "wildlife capital," making stops at the Upukerora River Mouth and the Te Anau Wildlife Centre for some last looks at the many New Zealand endemics we were now familiar with. After checking into our hotel, we drove to the harbor entrance for our cruise around Taiaroa Head, the only mainland breeding site of the huge Northern Royal Albatross. At our final dinner and checklist, the Kea was chosen as our "Bird of the Trip" and the "Enchanted Forest" was selected as our "Favorite Experience." We all agreed that New Zealand is a magical country that we will never forget!

Thur., Nov. 16 Departures

Some were departing this afternoon, and a few stayed longer in Dunedin. Our hotel was across the street from the Dunedin Botanic Garden where many of us spent the morning before leaving for the airport. Goodbye, New Zealand, and safe travels for all!

Photos by Pat Lueders: Group Photo, Kea, South Island Oystercatchers, Weka, Mount Cook, King Shag, Royal Spoonbill, New Zealand Fantail, Black-billed Gull & Bar-tailed Godwits, Sulphur Point, Purer Forest Park, Wrybill, Little Pied Cormorant, Ferry crossing to South Island, Spotted Shag, Cliffs near Kaikoura, Northern Royal Albatross, Shining Bronze-cuckoo, Black Stilt, Working Sheep Dog, Group at Mount Cook, Albatross, Brown Skua, Fiordland Penguins, Ulva Island, Mirror Lake, Yellow-eyed Penguin, Lake Gunn, Milford Sound, Milford Sound