

New Zealand

August 31st September 18th 2005

John van der Dol
&
Brian Short

“The boys done good in New Zealand”



Wandering Albatross

August 29/30th

After virtually no planning for this trip we arrived after 2 long flights via Singapore in Auckland at about 22.30 on August 30th. A shuttle bus picked us up and without any fuss we arrived at the Jet Inn which is just a few minutes drive from the airport. Here Brian and I settled in and tried to get some sleep but the anticipation of what was to come kept us both awake for most of the night.

August 31st

After an early breakfast and checking out of the hotel we stood in the car park, bins and scopes at the ready, only to find that most birds around the hotel were common British Garden species. We saw our first **Pied Shag** and **Spur-winged Plover** (not the European species) and nesting **Welcome Swallow**. **Purple Swamphen** or as known here by the Maori name Pukeko paraded on a grassy field. A species we were to find very common in the days to come. After 15 minutes or so, Karen Baird our guide from Kiwi Wildlife Tours for the next few days, arrived in a very comfortable minibus and off we went. First stop – Mangere Inlet on the west coast on the outskirts of Auckland. A pair of **NZ Dotterel** were our first exciting new species soon followed by 49 **Royal Spoonbills** and several **Pied Stilts** (split from Black winged stilt by Clements!).

A single **Wrybill** close by the side of the road was immediately followed by a flock of c450 on the other side of the road. What a start. We continued on to Te Kauri Lodge, owned by Karen and Chris Gaskin where we had coffee on the balcony while **Tuis** visited the trees within feet of our cameras. A few **Fantails** and a **Grey Warbler** joined the party. Karen does not believe in sitting still for long and we were soon on our way north stopping at Waipu Cove for two **Fairy Terns** of which there are only 15 pairs existing in NZ. Over 100 **Variable Oystercatchers** gave us much entertainment and **Sacred Kingfishers** were around also. We drove to a stream near Teal Bay specifically for a party of 32 **Brown Teal**, another very rare NZ endemic. The main reason for coming north was to meet up with Detlef and Carol Davies recent emigrants from Essex with whom we would spend the night. After dinner we were driven in the dark to a site near the coast where they have found Brown Kiwi from the public footpath. An hours walk down a gentle valley towards the sea with torches covered with red plastic to filter the light so as not to scare the birds and there amongst the sheep we found a **Brown Kiwi** and heard others plus **Morepork** in the distance. We retired at 10.30 totally exhausted. This was just day 1!

September 1st

Lie in to get over jet lag? No chance. Up and on the road by 05.30 to make the dash back to Auckland to catch the 08.45 ferry to the island of Tiritiri Matangi. After a delay because of fog we did eventually get away and Brian and I were left to our own devices. Not difficult as there are not many endemic species to deal with and all are easy to identify. En route to the island **Little Blue Penguin**, **White-fronted Tern** and **Fluttering Shearwater** were seen in small numbers. Tiritiri is a predator free zone and many of the trans-located birds such as **NI Saddleback**, **Stitchbird**, **NI Robin** are doing well. We spent most of the day on the island and enjoyed the very rare Takahe amongst others. Our only omission was **Kokako** heard but not seen apart from a brief flight view.

We arrived back on the mainland by 4 o'clock and were soon picked up by Karen and immediately whisked off for more new species. Some nearby ponds produced **Grey Duck** and **Grey Teal**, **Australasian Shoveler**, but it was the endemic **NZ Dabchick** and **NZ Scaup** we were after. We succeeded in seeing both of them with 3 **Banded Rails** nearby as an added bonus.

Back to the lodge for two nights where we were greeted by Morepork within feet of the balcony. A relatively early night was not only deserved but necessary.



September 2nd

After another early breakfast, a brief stop for **NI Tomtit** and **New Zealand Pipit** we were off for a pelagic around the Hauraki Gulf. We set off in clearing fog from Ti point and cruised around the gulf as far out as the Mokohinan Islands in a fast fishing boat. It wasn't long before Fluttering Shearwaters surrounded us followed by building numbers of **White-Faced Storm Petrels** and **Common Diving Petrels**. Odd **Little Shearwaters**, two **Buller's Shearwaters**, good views of **Fairy Prion** and both **Giant Petrels**. The weather was sunny and

generally just wonderful. **Common Dolphins** rode the bow wave, **Bottle nosed Dolphins** were also seen and excellent views of a **Minke Whale** even showing its white flippers as it cruised by the bow of our boat.

We got back after dark after a fantastic experience. We followed this with a Tai take away and yet another early night, before guess what? Tomorrow another early start.

September 3rd

A pre-dawn departure and on our way south to Pureora Forest for some more new species. Didn't take long to find two or three **Kakas** and a couple of **Yellow-crowned Parakeets**, and a party of **Rifleman**. Onwards to Lake Taupo right in the middle of North Island. We were rewarded by some **Little Black Shags**, **Black-billed Gulls** which were a target species. An **Australasian Bittern** boomed but did not show itself. Just down the road a little 2 **Ni Fernbirds** gave stunning views whilst NZ Scaup loafed about on a pond in the reed bed.

A nearby river produced a brief flyby of a **Blue Duck** for Brian but not Karen or I. A brief search proved unsuccessful so we were forced to drive to a more reliable spot called Manganuioteao River where immediately on arrival we found a pair sitting on a rock. We photographed this rare endemic, watched **NZ Pigeon** feed above our heads and then left on our long way north to our accommodation at Waitomo Caves within striking distance of the airport next morning.

This hotel is of the same standard as Fawly Towers where the Manageress with thick round glasses came to the table to show us the plate of burned garlic bread apologising profusely and promising to try again. Our suggestion to accept the burnt offerings at half price brought a wry smile to her face and she scuttled off with the thought of having had her first success of the day at 20.30.

September 4th

Yes you guessed, up early and off to the airport for our 10.00 flight to Christchurch and the joys of South Island. Fond farewells at the airport and soon on our way with views of volcanoes and mountains below. Even the Kaikoura Peninsula could be identified from the air. Within 90 minutes we were landing at Christchurch and another adventure about to start.

It did not take long to collect our baggage and we set off to find Brian's son, Andrew, who is presently living in Kaikoura and had driven to Christchurch to meet us off the plane. Seeing Andrew was the main reason for visiting New Zealand (Yeah right!) and the fact that he lives in Kaikoura has nothing to do with Brian and I flying, literally, half way round the world.

We set off in Andrew's estate car which was virtually going to be our home for the next two weeks. A couple of stops at Waipara Estuary and Amberley Beach, both just north of Christchurch, produced some beautiful **Black-fronted Terns** and **Banded Dotterels** amongst other things. A search for Black Stilts produced no more than hybrids but it was a good exercise nevertheless.

We carried on north and after 2 ½ hours of driving we finally arrived in Kaikoura, the place in the world I have wanted to visit more than anywhere else. I knew I was not going to be disappointed as we looked offshore and saw 1,000s of **Hutton's Shearwaters**, a Giant Petrel, **Spotted Shags** and **NZ Fur Seals** on the rocks. This was an indication of what was to come.

Although very tired we had a nice evening meal in a smart restaurant with a dumb waitress who had as much charisma as the mechanical version of that name. It was a fine way to celebrate Andrew's birthday. With much anticipation we tried to get to sleep early but I don't think it worked.

September 5th

This was the day I had dreamed about ever since I read about albatrosses off Kaikoura. We had a taster off Cape Town a couple of years ago but this was going to be special, very special..

We met the owner of Ocean Wings Dennis Buurman at the reception centre for the Albatross Encounters boat trips who made us very welcome. We then set off with our boatman, Alastair, in

the minibus down to the south quay where the boat sat on a trailer. It was launched with us on it down the slipway and off we went. Our first encounter after just a few minutes was with the huge raft of Hutton's Shearwaters of which we were now able to get excellent views. After just a mile or two **Pintado Petrels** started following the boat and Giant Petrels started taking an interest. Just 10-15 minutes out at sea, we stopped and Alastair slung the small plastic net with frozen fish liver overboard and all hell let loose. Pintados went mental, Giant Petrels became aggressive and spread their wings to make themselves look even bigger and **Salvin's Albatrosses** piled in. If we had thought that these were big, in came the **Wandering Albatrosses** with wingspans of 3.6 metres, wider than the boat! This was madness, three sub-species of Wandering to sort out, Salvin's everywhere, then a load of **White-capped Albatrosses** to photograph when Alastair shouted "**Southern Royal**". Then **Northern Royal** and unbelievably a **Sub-Antarctic Black-browed**, the only one we were to see this holiday. Most of these would land and sit on the water within feet of the boat. Others were having a scrap over the tiny bits of fish offal they were able to get out of the basket. It did not seem worth it! Albatrosses were flying about all over the place.



But there were others to look at. I have always wanted to see a Prion and although we had seen some up north, here were another 100 **Fairy Prions** to dribble over. Another shout went up, "**Grey-faced Petrel**" and another. This was the dream, I have had for all those years, come true.

Salvin's Albatross

We pulled in the chum bag and carried on a little further in order to try and get rid off some of the Wanderers. They are aggressive and put other birds off especially when they are present in large numbers. But the birds were not about to let go and wherever we stopped we were surrounded by albatrosses and petrels. **Kelp** and **Red-billed Gulls** were also permanently present and two Black-fronted Terns flew over.

After about two hours we started the return journey only to bump into a pod of about a dozen **Hector's Dolphins**, a rare endemic in these waters. Excellent views as they played around our boat and on the way back we again sailed through the raft of 10,000+ Hutton's Shearwaters newly arrived back from the Tasman Sea amongst which we managed to find two Fluttering Shearwaters.

This must rank as one of the most exciting ornithological experiences to be had on this planet and another trip was planned for tomorrow. The afternoon was spent looking around the general area and about 70 NZ Fur Seals were found loitering on the rocks.

A home-cooked meal was much enjoyed and we retired fairly early in anticipation of a repeat tomorrow.

September 6th

Another calm day with a one metre NE swell. We again went straight out and the experience was much as yesterday, but it would take a lot more than a trip or two to get fed up with this. Although the species were the same, the numbers were slightly less than yesterday. This really gave us more time to sort out the different sub-species of Wanderers. A female Snowy looks just like a

male Gibson's and some Antipodeans look like Gibson's. It is not always easy and some probably cannot be separated reliably. It gave us a great opportunity to do more photography and even for a non-photographer like myself it is possible to get some stunning images.

The return journey today was augmented with about ten **Dusky Dolphins**, another new cetacean.

Although nothing new was seen this morning, we could not wait to get out on the ocean again and another trip was booked for the end of our holiday in about ten days time. But guess what, another sea trip tomorrow, but this time on the on the Whale Boat.

The afternoon was spent relaxing as from a bird point of view there is not that much to do unless you want to look at **Dunnocks** and **Blackbirds**. Our photos were downloaded on to disc in the local photo shop and some prints were run off. The quality of some of the shots was going to play a major role in our activities over the next two weeks as we had produced results we did not know we were capable of. The NZ branch of the gay camera club was born! (Follows references in our trips reports to South Africa and Sri Lanka)

September 7th

We had to arrive at 07.45 at the Whale-boat station where we were encouraged to watch a short film show about the sealife off the Kaikoura coast. Then off in a coach to the same quay as the last two days, but this time we boarded a very smart fast jet engined sea cat which took us a long way out in no time at all. The onboard presentation was very interesting but rudely interrupted by a dark petrel flying past the window. It was nice to have our identification confirmed as a **Westland Petrel**, our first of the trip, although another three were to be seen this morning. Small numbers of the usual albatrosses were noted as we stopped a few times to do echo soundings in search of whales.

After about two hours of trying for whales without success the boat returned to shore. They were not around today and could not even be found by us, the other boats and aircraft out looking for them. As we got 80% of our money back for our lack of success I was quite happy to have been out on the ocean and we could use the money to book another trip at the end of our holiday.

We had a quick lunch in town and set off for the west coast and the start of our tour of South Island. Our next stop was to be Punakaiki, primarily for Westland Petrel which breeds there in the forested mountains. We booked in to the Paparoa Park Motel and went for a walk to the beach. Here we could watch hundreds of Westland Petrels feeding in the surf and Spotted Shags were passing by constantly. Biting Sand Flies soon put pay to our visit to the beach so we returned to the motel to wait until dusk. We watched a tame **Weka** in the garden and managed some more piccies.

At dusk we walked out on to the road and watched Westland Petrels flying across the road over our heads to their nesting places in the mountains. Another new experience for which this place is famous. We followed this with a big steak in a bar 2km further north, which was more in keeping with the American Wild West than what we had expected in New Zealand, but then the west coast is a bit wild in places. An early night because the next few days required us to do a lot of driving.

September 8th

Brian was up before dawn to watch the Petrels returning to the sea low over the Motel.

We started off early enough and went to look at the famous (well in NZ anyway) Pancake Rocks before we set off south in search of parrots that destroy cars! Our destination was the Franz Joseph Glacier. The scenery in this part of NZ is just stunning and there are hardly any people to spoil things. Nevertheless bird species are few so there is little need to stop en route.

Australasian Harriers circled the hills and Purple Swamphens grazed the pastures along with **Paradise Shelducks** while New Zealand Pigeons could occasionally be seen bending branches in a leafless tree and a Weka or two by the side of the road.

After lunch we arrived at the glacier, but really apart from a couple of good views of South Island Tomtits all we saw was fantastic scenery and a big dirty ice cube. We moved on to Fox Glacier, which is supposed to be another site for parrots. Another walk and further stories of back-packers having seen flocks of them in car parks, birds being fed by hand in the high street last night and birds raiding dustbins. Things were becoming desperate, as we could not afford too much time. We had seabirds to see! A walk to another ice cube and back in the rain and then a cry "**Kea**". That must be one, but where is it. There, as it flew over the valley at some height. Is that the best we could do? We spent the next hour driving round car parks and housing estates looking for dustbins? If our friends could see us now!

That has to be birding at its worst and I was glad to be on our way even if we did not see a Kea demolishing a car. A small consolation was being shown the rubbers round the rear windscreen of a car belonging to a not very amused young lady.

Next stop, Lake Moeraki where the Wilderness Lodge organises guided walks for the Fiordland Crested Penguin. Well not only was the motel closed for a couple of weeks because of lack of business, there were no guided walks and then a member of staff said they had not been seeing any birds either. Disappointed we went to look at the beach where they can sometimes be seen but we were running out of time as we still had no accommodation. We moved on and found McGuire's Lodge at Haast and over a lovely meal we looked forward to a better day tomorrow.

September 9th

Today's itinerary was to get to Twizel and check the braided rivers for the rarest wader in the world. On the way we planned to make some stops for forest birds, which we did in the wooded hills above Haast at Gates of Haast. Here we managed to find some Rifleman, **Brown Creepers** and a female **SI Robin**. A Kea flew over the forest calling but again views were limited. Andrew found the **Yellowhead**, which was the target species, but it did not hang around long enough for Brian and I to get a view.

Our first new bird just out of Haast was a **NZ Falcon** on top of a pine and this one sat around long enough for our senior gay camera club member to get a picture. A stunning bird!

After a long drive we arrived at Omarama. Here we checked the braided Ahuiriri river from the bridge but without success. We then tried to reach the area where the river enters Lake Benmore which was rather unproductive, but it did not help that we could not find a way to the shore.

We arrived back at Omarama in the late afternoon and checked again from the bridge. No luck, so we decided to walk down stream on the northern bank. After maybe a quarter of a mile we struck gold. Here on a little pool we found our first and only **Black Stilt** a bird sporting a colour ring and some patches of white with a couple of Pied Stilts. Considering there are less than 100 pure birds in the world, this was quite an experience. It eventually flew off into the distance.

We were left with no alternative but to push on to Twizel in the hope of seeing that elusive all dark bird at the sites nearby. We covered the two remaining sites on our map but to no avail. We then decided to find some accommodation in Twizel and make for the east coast first thing in the morning. We were keen to get south towards Stewart Island. We had not seen any seabirds for a few days and we were keen to put this right.

September 10th

In the early dawn we pulled up along side the DOC Black Stilt breeding site and were allowed a covert view of two breeding adults, but birds in pens are not what we came to see!

Time to move on, so back to Oamaru a brief view from the bridge and then we made straight for the coast and a town called Oamaru where we knew there was a Little Penguin colony. Unfortunately they are only seen at dusk when they come ashore and the beach is overlooked by people in a stand, built specifically for this purpose, which Old Trafford would be proud of. They do guided walks of the breeding colony and are able to show punters birds sitting on nests. A little persuasion and a few bucks and we were shown two birds in a breeding box. Well, I am glad that the money went to a good cause because looking through a dirty piece of glass at two Penguins was not my idea of birdwatching. A party of 16 **Stewart Island Shags** sat on the breakwater though adding to our already good total of Cormorant/Shag species.

We moved on after having been told that the **Yellow-eyed Penguin** site just down the road would be empty also. Well, we were here, so we might as well have a look. Within one minute of arriving at the look-out Andrew had spotted our target. It came waddling down the beach and disappeared into the surf. Excellent stuff. Then a local approached us and asked if we had seen the penguin sat by the fence next to the path. No, we had walked straight past it. Why had it bothered to climb a tall nearly sheer cliff? We now have pictures of a bird no more than two feet away! I have come to the conclusion though that I am not really into penguins, their wingspan is rubbish and they don't fly too well either!

We carried on south, a brief one minute stop to see the Moeraki Boulders, yes they were still there and then to Shag Point to find two more Y E Penguins, ten more Stewart Island Shags and a couple of Spotted Shags plus a rather nice American lady who seemed only too pleased to give us her full sized guide to the birds of New Zealand. Now we had some real text to study!

We moved on towards Dunedin seeing three Royal Spoonbills on the way. Our destination was Otago Point, the home of, at last, some real birds again. This is the only mainland colony of Albatrosses namely the Northern Royal. A guided walk and looking through the observatory window, three birds were watched. I have to say, they look better at sea. We were given the life history of the species and a short film was shown. Amazing birds!

We had planned on staying on Otago Peninsula, but we had cleaned up so we decided to carry on south. We found accommodation at Balclutha and eat at Picasso's.

September 11th

We had breakfast, checked out and were on our way, first stop, Nugget Point. It was a beautiful sunny morning and visibility was excellent. We parked the car in the car park and walked the rest to the end of the Point by the lighthouse. Here we found an observation platform where we spent the next hour or two. The rocks below were covered in NZ Fur Seals and we tried very hard to find a Sea Lion but without success. They are supposed to occur here and I was keen to get some pictures.

Odd Shags and Red-billed and Black-billed Gulls were flying around but the prize of the day were the ten or so **Southern Buller's Albatrosses** which were flying up and down. Unfortunately they were a little distant but identifiable nevertheless.

We now had got it into our heads to find Sea Lions. Next stop, Curio Bay. A walk along the beach was unsuccessful, the female which had spent the last few days outside a beach café was also absent. So Waipapa Point had to be next as the map indicated NZ Sea Lions on the beach.

A rather frustrating march around a sandy bay produced no more than bathing White-fronted Terns and two small boys trying to bury each other in the sand. We were about to give up when Andrew decided to check just one last stretch of sand and there, right below the cliff, five **Hooker's Sea Lion** and a big bull further up the beach. We watched them for a while and took many pictures.

We now realised that if we put our foot down we could get to Stewart Island a day early. A few phone-calls (these mobiles are wonderful) and we were on our way to Bluff. Our accommodation on Stewart Island was able to take us a day early and so we boarded the mid-afternoon ferry a fast sea cat. One can see a few birds from the stern. A few Pintado Petrels followed the boat, three more Southern Buller's Albatrosses were seen and a **South Georgian Diving Petrel** was identified. The locals say that it is virtually impossible to tell them from Common Diving Petrel but this bird was pure white underneath, including the under wing coverts and white ear covers. They do breed in small numbers on Codfish Island just round the corner and with modern binoculars and good light at reasonable distance I feel it is possible to tell some birds apart.

Amazingly we met Ulva, who was to take us to Ulva Island and Philip Smith who was to take us on the Kiwi tour, on board the ferry.

On arrival at Halfmoon Bay on Stewart Island we were met by Bev, the owner of our accommodation. The Bay Motel was very comfortable and we settled in very quickly. We were able to unpack as we were going to be here for three whole nights. A nice meal in a local restaurant and we were ready for bed.

September 12th

Dawn broke and the weather was good yet again. So far we have been so lucky with the weather. It is not supposed to be like this down here at this time of year. Kakas were flying about all over the place and vying for our attention with the local Tuis. A quick breakfast and we were on our way to Halfmoon Bay where we were to meet Ulva and our water taxi. A small, but fast boat that was to take us to Ulva Island.



Stewart Island Shags

This island has been cleared of man-introduced pests and endemic species have been translocated here, and they are doing well. Ulva Goodwillie is the local official guide to the island of the same name and she proudly and enthusiastically led us round for 4 or 5 hours. She showed us many interesting plant species and had a story to tell about most of them. Birds included Robins, Tomtits, Brown Creepers, both Red and Yellow-crowned Parakeets, Kakas, SI Saddlebacks and finally two Yellowheads which gave excellent views. She was very proud of the fact that the island was clear of any introduced species.

Brian, why did you have to call "**Redpoll**"? I don't think she believed it at first. An hour or two later I found a couple of birds in the undergrowth which eventually were identified as Dunnocks. This led to talk of shooting and eradicating! Oh dear, perhaps we should have put a sock in it? Ulva is both a wonderful island and must if one is staying on Stewart Island and also a very interesting and knowledgeable person with plans to come to the Rutland Birdfair!

We returned to our accommodation, had some bacon sandwiches, a short rest and then off down to the main harbour. This time to meet Philip Smith and his fishing boat. It was 6pm and by the time we had reached our destination it was dark. We had coffee on the boat and a short talk about Stewart Island Brown Kiwis and set off with torches in search of these pre-historic creatures. It took four hours of searching beaches and forests before a tape lure finally attracted a Kiwi which came steaming up the track like boy racer with "attitude" followed shortly after by a juvenile who had already learnt the technique.

I think I preferred the **Leopard Seal** which we found on the beach which apparently was only about the fourth time Philip had seen one on these beaches in 17 years of being out every other night. Another impressive mammal on the list. It was 11.30 when we arrived back at the quay. We wandered back to our base and it was not long after I could here guttural noises from the other room. Glad I had my own room!

September 13th

We virtually had a day off today. We went for a walk in the morning, but from a bird point of view today was unproductive. We got some nice photos of Variable Oystercatcher on the beach and while Brian and Andrew went for a walk in the afternoon I decided to have a rest. Had there been a big party of us we could have chartered a boat to circumnavigate Stewart Island, but with just the three of us this would prove too expensive. Besides that the weather had been so calm that there appeared to be few birds close inshore. The ferry trips to and from mainland proved that.

A nice evening meal in the local pub by the harbour, but real drinking was out of the question as the pub closed at 9pm. Yet another early night and dreams of our return to Kaikoura. We were planning on getting back there as quickly as possible in order to get back out amongst the real birds. We could get back in two days.

September 14th

The first ferry back to Bluff was again a calm affair in patchy fog most dense at the entrance to Bluff Harbour. A single Buller's, two Pintados, a Common Diving Petrel and four Stewart Island Shags were really the only birds of interest on the entire crossing.

We picked up our car out of the secure compound and set off north. We stopped at a couple of sites just north of Invercargill for Black-fronted Dotterel, but were unsuccessful. Three **Cattle Egrets** en route were really the only new birds for the trip north. We made for Timaru and arrived there teatime. Here we had, what I consider to have been, the tastiest Indian meal I have ever had in an empty restaurant. Either that or I had really missed spicy food. The motel was mediocre, but it was just for one night and we were too tired to worry about it.

September 15th

A final dash and by late afternoon we arrived home at the same accommodation, back in Kaikoura. We stopped off at Lake Ellesmere on the way, but the mosquitoes made it an unpleasant experience and the 2-3,000 **Black Swans** did not improve the situation. It was high tide at the Waipura estuary, just north of Christchurch, and apart from finding a **Black-tailed Godwit** and a **Whimbrel**, both unusual species, there was not much there.

Three Giant Petrel sp and 1,000s of Hutton's Shearwaters signalled we were back. A wonderful home-cooked meal (of chicken soup, rice and bread) by Andrew and his Japanese girlfriend Erika at Let's (Thai Lady) house (don't ask) and copious amounts of red wine helped celebrate our return. I hoped the sea was not going to be too lumpy tomorrow.

September 16th

Dawn broke calm which was just as well. Today we were booked for two trips out on the ocean: this morning for birds and this afternoon for whales.

As usual Alastair our skipper took us straight out and it was not long before Pintado Petrels were following the boat. The first albatrosses to arrive were usually Salvin's, these were followed swiftly by Wandering, of which two dozen of the three sub-species were estimated. White-capped made up further variety while today we had two Southern Buller's at the back of the boat. Eventually

they came close enough to allow us to get some stunning images. Four Southern and two Northern Royal Albatrosses joined the party and what a party it was!

There were feeding frenzies and scraps between Wanderers grabbing each other by the neck while Giant Petrels stood by awaiting their opportunity to get to the chum basket. Salvin's were seen having a conversation and Pintados were constantly chattering away. Fairy Prions had decreased to just four birds, but Westland Petrels were now arriving in the area and four were seen. Three Grey-faced Petrels and a **White-chinned Petrel** gave us identification opportunities. All this made it yet another fantastic experience. A Fluttering Shearwater was picked out on the way back.

In the afternoon we joined the Whale Boat again. This time we were successful and as we stood on the top deck we were able to watch 10-15 adolescent male **Sperm Whales** playing around, sometimes fluking their tails as they dove down to feed. The rest of the afternoon was spent relaxing before another wonderful home-cooked meal by Andrew and Erika. This was followed by a few beers and a live band in a local pub. And the lead singer?—Alastair. Is there no end to this guy's talent? And guess what, tomorrow? Another Albatross boat trip! I prayed for calm weather.

September 17th

My prayers were answered, another calm day and another trip out on the waves. Today Alastair pulled out all the stops with just the four of us in the boat. He knew what we were after and he knew where to find them.

He sailed out further south this time and within half an hour we had three **Antarctic Fulmars** under our belt. Our mission complete! Again we went further out and the usual albatrosses were everywhere, today joined by a juvenile Southern Buller's. But it was the petrels which took centre stage today. Three White-chinned, 15 Westlands and what turned out to be a single **Black Petrel**. One of the Gibson's had a red colour ring with white numbers 894 on it. To show how close we were to these birds we were able to photograph just the leg with the ring!

On the return journey we were able to watch the pod of about 15 Hector's Dolphins again.

This was to be our last bit of birding this trip as tomorrow we had to drive to Christchurch for our flight home via Singapore.



Pintado Petrels

So the boys done good, but what about New Zealand as a birding destination?

If you are after a long list of species then New Zealand is not going to be your chosen destination. If you like seabirds, then there probably is not a better place in the world and we were not even there at the best time. An ideal time is November to April. The experience off Kaikoura in particular is hard to beat. Northern pelagics at another time of year also look spectacular either in the Hauraki Gulf or off the North Cape. Bigger groups are required for these as chartering boats is expensive. Circumnavigating Stewart Island is also a possibility, even including the Snares Islands if the weather is favourable. It is also possible to undertake pelagics off Haast on the West Coast.

To clean up on the endemic passerines requires a lot of driving. Given three weeks it should be possible to see them all and include all the pelagics.

I would recommend two companies who have given us fantastic service:

1. Chris Gaskin and Karen Baird of Kiwi Tours at www.kiwi-wildlife.co.nz can arrange any tour, north and south as well as any pelagic. Karen looked after us very well on North Island.
2. Dennis Buurman, the owner of Ocean Wings at Kaikoura, runs Albatross Encounters and we found him and his staff very friendly and helpful www.oceanwings.co.nz.

I would like to thank Alastair, our skipper, for a very professional and friendly service and Philip Smith on Stewart Island also runs a very professional set up to find the Kiwis.

I must thank Brian for coming up with the idea of going to New Zealand in the first place and Andrew, his son, for his company and driving us around the whole of South Island for two weeks.

Finally, New Zealand is a long way away, but it is worth it, and I will certainly return, hopefully with a bigger group concentrating mainly on pelagics.

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Systematic List

The nomenclature used in the following list is a mixture of names with which we are familiar in the West and names used in New Zealand fieldguides. Some are old Maori names. Even the Latin names sometimes do not correspond with our understanding of the situation and the taxonomy also does not always agree with other well-used texts in the West. See three species/sub-species of Wandering Albatross or the Pied Oystercatcher for example. As long as the reader can understand which species is being referred to then there should be no problem.

(E) endemic to New Zealand. (N) (S) refer to North and South Islands as does NI and SI

Stewart Island Kiwi (*Apteryx australis*) (E)

After a number of hours searching the forests and the beaches we eventually had a male and juvenile walking around our feet affording excellent views(S).

North Island Brown Kiwi (*Apteryx australis*) (E)

Currently the same species as the previous one but a candidate to become one of three Brown Kiwi species in the future. A single was seen near the coast north-east of Keri Keri (N).and another heard.

Yellow-eyed Penguin (*Megadyptes antipodes*) (E)

A single on the beach at Omoaru (S) was followed by another single right next to the path on top of the cliff. How on earth it got up there is anyones guess. It was tagged, number J17442 on its flipper.

Two further birds were seen from Shag Point (S).

Little Blue Penguin (*Eudyptula minor*)

About 40 were seen from the ferry to Tiritiri Mantangi (N) and another 19 on our pelagic in the Hauraki Gulf. A pair was seen on the nest at their breeding colony at Omoaru and another eight from the water taxi to the Island of Ulva off Stewart Island.

Great Crested Grebe (Australasian Crested Grebe) (*Podiceps cristatus*)

Two were seen on a lake near Twizel (S).

New Zealand Dabchick (*Poliiocephalus rufopectus*)

A single at a pond at Waiwera (N) and eight on Lake Taupo (N).

Seabirds

Any birds seen off our four pelagics out of Kaikoura are listed in the following table. Other records including some of the same species are noted below.

Northern Royal Albatross (*Diomedea sanfordi*) (E)

Three were seen at the breeding colony at Otago Peninsula, Dunedin.



White-capped Albatross

White-capped Albatross (*Thalassarche melanophrys*)

One or two seen on the Whale trip out of Kaikoura.

Salvin's Albatross (*Thalassarche salvini*)

About six seen on our first Whale trip out of Kaikoura.

Southern Buller's Albatross (*Thalassarche bulleri bulleri*) (E)

Thirteen were seen off Nugget Point (S), a single between South and Stewart Islands. All were adults with the exception of a single off the Kaikoura Albatross boat on our last pelagic which was a juvenile with a grey/green bill with a dark tip, not unlike juvenile Black-browed but with a grey head as opposed to white.

Seabird Counts from Albatross boat trips, Kaikoura					
		date	date	date	date
Species		5 th Sept	6 th Sept	16 th Sept	17 th Sept
Northern Royal Albatross (E)	Diomedea sanfordi	1	2	2	
Southern Royal Albatross	Diomedea epomophora	2	2	4	
Snowy (Wandering) Albatross	Diomedea exulans	2	2	2	4
Gibson's (Wandering) Albatross	Diomedea gibsoni	25	15	18	20
Antipodean (Wandering) Albatross	Diomedea antipodensis	5	2	4	3
Black-browed (Sub Antarctic) Albatross	Thalassarche melanophrys	1			
New Zealand White-capped Albatross	Thalassarche steadi	10	6	8	10
Salvin's Albatross	Thalassarche salvini	15	15	15	20
Southern Buller's Albatross (E)	Thalassarche bulleri bulleri			2	1
Northern Giant Petrel	Macronectes halli	8	10	20	5
Southern Giant Petrel	Macronectes giganteus	1	3	3	
Westland Petrel (E)	Procellaria westlandica			4	15
White-chinned Petrel	Procellaria aequinoctialis			1	3
Grey-faced Petrel	Pterodroma macroptera		2	3	
Black Petrel (E)	Procellaria parkinsoni				1
Pintado Petrel	Daption capense	100	50	100	150
Antarctic Fulmar	Fulmarus glacialisoides				3
Fairy Prion	Pachyptila turtur	100	30	4	2
Huttons Shearwater (E)	Puffinus huttoni	1000s	10,000+	1000+	1000+
Fluttering Shearwater (E)	Puffinus gavius	2		1	
Australasian Gannet	Morus serrator		1	1	

Giant Petrel sp (*Macronectes sp*)

Any look out at sea particularly on South Island is likely to be rewarded with a Giant Petrel but one needs to be close to see the bill tip colour in order to determine which species one is looking at. Both species were seen in the Hauraki Gulf as they responded well to chumming.

Buller's Shearwater (*Puffinus bulleri*) (E)

Two, unfortunately rather distant views, were had in the Hauraki Gulf.

Fluttering Shearwater (*Puffinus gavius*) (E)

Three from the ferry to Tiritiri Mantangi were followed by 57 on our pelagic in the Hauraki Gulf.

Hutton's Shearwater (*Puffinus huttoni*) (E)

At this time of year big rafts can be seen just offshore at Kaikoura and thousands were noted whenever we looked. The only place in the world they breed is in the mountains behind Kaikoura. The colonies have declined seriously in recent years as a result of man-introduced pests.

Little Shearwater (*Puffinus assimilis*)

A count of 14 was made in the Hauraki Gulf.

Common Diving Petrel (*Pelecanoides urinatrix*)

Counts totalling about 375 birds were made in the Hauraki Gulf and a single was seen from the ferry between Stewart Island and the mainland.

South Georgian Diving Petrel (*Pelecanoides georgicus*)

Supposedly very difficult to separate from the previous species in the field. A bird was seen well from the Stewart Island ferry, showing its all white under-parts and underwing coverts and white ear-coverts and looking very different from all the Common Diving Petrels we had seen. We are in no doubt that this was in fact a South Georgian Diving Petrel. A small number of pairs breed on Codfish Island off Stewart Island.

Westland Petrel (*Procellaria westlandica*) (E)

Four were seen from the Whale boat out of Kaikoura on our first trip out. On arriving at Punakaika (S) on the west coast in the evening several hundred could be seen feeding in the surf. At dusk the birds came in shore to roost in the densely forested coastal foothills of the Paparoa Range, Westland. They can be seen flying very low overhead but unfortunately not until the light is failing.

Pintado Petrel (Cape Pigeon) (*Daption capense*)

About 50 were seen off the Whale boat and two lots of two of the Stewart Island Ferry. Two races were identified, the common one being the Snares Island race (australe) which has the least amount of white on the back and wings, and the Southern Cape Pigeon (capense) which breeds further south on the sub-antarctic islands of New Zealand.

White-faced Storm Petrel (*Pelagodroma marina maoriana*)

A conservative count of 365 was made on our pelagic in Hauraki Gulf.

Australasian Gannet (*Morus serrator*)

Just odd ones seen and many noted on the Hauraki Gulf pelagic.

Great Cormorant (Black Shag) (*Phalacrocorax carbo*)

Between one and six on six dates.

Pied Shag (*Phalacrocorax varius*)

Ten on our first day in the Auckland area after which up to four were seen in many locations both north and south.

Little Black Shag (*Phalacrocorax sulcirostris*)

Six at Lake Taupo and another two at Lake Ellesmere(S).

Little Shag (*Phalacrocorax melanoleucos*)

Seen on 11 dates with a maximum of 40 at lake Taupo.

Spotted Shag (*Stictocarbo punctatus*) (E)

About 200 near Kaikoura and many 100s in the Dunedin area were the largest numbers, but double figures were seen most days on both east and west coasts off South Island.

Stewart Island Shag (*Leucocarbo chalconotus*) (E)

A large breeding colony on the Otago Peninsula consisted of some hundreds of birds after which just eight were seen on the way to Ulva Island and another four from the ferry off Stewart Island.

Great White Egret (White Heron) (*Egretta alba*)

Two were seen on some lagoons at Okarito (S).

Cattle Egret (*Bubulcus ibis*)

Three were noted somewhere between Bluff and Timaru (S).

White-faced Heron (*Ardea novaehollandiae*)

By far the commonest heron of the area and seen daily, sometimes in high numbers especially in muddy estuaries.

(Australasian Bittern) (*Botaurus poiciloptilus*)

A single was heard booming at Taupo Lake but was unfortunately never seen.

Royal Spoonbill (*Platalea regia*)

About 50 were seen in Mangere Inlet followed by five the same day in the Waipu estuary. In the south there were three on some pools on the east coast north of Dunedin and another four were seen between Timaru and Kaikoura.

Black Swan (*Cygnus atratus*)

Seen wherever there was a bit of water but an estimate of 2-3000 on Ellesmere Lake was unexpected

Canada Goose (*Branta canadensis*)

Seen on five dates all in the south with a maximum of 18 birds

Paradise Shelduck (*Tadorna variegata*) (E)

Seen virtually daily mostly in pairs grazing on pasture. Numbers of up to 40 or more were seen.

Blue Duck (*Hymenolaimus malacorhynchos*) (E)

A single was seen in flight at a small river near Lake Taupo and a pair were watched and photographed on another river in the same general area.

Mallard (*Anas platyrhynchos*)

Seen virtually daily in small numbers.

Grey Duck (*Anas superciliosa*)

Seen in most suitable areas with counts of up to 20.

Australasian Shoveler (*Anas rhynchos*)

Up to 20 on five dates on both islands

Grey Teal (*Anas gracilis*)

Two to four on five dates and 15 in the Waipara estuary

Brown Teal (*Anas aucklandica*) (E)

A group of 32 at roost on a small stream in northland were watched at close range. This is another rare endemic.

New Zealand Scaup (*Aythya novaeseelandiae*) (E)

Small numbers in most suitable wet habitat and 100+ on Lake Benmore (S).

Australasian Harrier (*Circus approximans*)

With no competition this is a very common raptor which feeds on an abundance of roadkills, mostly possums. Up to 30 could be seen in any one day depending on the amount of driving we did.

New Zealand Falcon (*Falco novaeseelandiae*) (E)

A single was seen sitting on top of a pine on the side of the road just inland from Haast.

Pheasant (*Phasianus colchicus*)

Fortunately only one was seen from the car on the first day.

Brown Quail (*Synoicus ypsilophorus*)

Two were seen on the path in front of us on Tiritiri Mantangi

Weka (*Gallirallus australis*) (E)

Four of the western sub-species were seen on the two days we spent in Westland, about 15 were seen on Ulva and Stewart Island, these belonging to the Stewart Island Sub-species and a further single there the next day.

Banded Rail (*Rallus philippensis*)

Three were seen near Waiwera (N)

Takahe (*Porphyrio mantelli*) (E)

Two very tame individuals were watched and photographed on Tiritiri Mantangi.

Purple Swamphen (Pukeko) (*Porphyrio porphyrio*)

Commonly encountered throughout and found most grazing on pasture.

Australian Coot (*Fulica atra australis*)

About a dozen on a small lake between Kaikoura and Greymouth and another load on Lake Benmore.

Pied Oystercatcher (South Island Pied Oystercatcher) (*Haematopus ostralegus* or *H. longirostris*)

Texts do not appear to agree exactly which species these belong to. Some say it is a race of the Eurasian species whilst others give it full status.

However they are common on both North and South Island.

Variable Oystercatcher (*Haematopus unicolor*) (E)

Also commonly found on most beaches in all colour phases. Not seen on pasture as with the previous species.



Masked Lapwing (Spur-winged Plover)

(*Vanellus miles novaehollandiae*)

Commonly found throughout.

Pied Stilt (*Himantopus himantopus leucocephalus*)

Also found throughout in small numbers in all suitable habitat.

Black Stilt (*Himantopus novaezelandiae*) (E)

Probably the rarest wader in the world with less than 100 pure individuals in the world. It readily crossbreeds with Pied Stilt which does its own species no good. A single bird was found on one of the braided rivers near Twizel. A numbers of hybrids were found also. Two birds in captivity at the Black Stilt Centre for re-introduction were also seen, although waders in a cage don't look too good.

Banded Dotterel (*Charadrius bicinctus*) (E)

After the first six on the two estuaries just north of Christchurch between one and four were seen on another six occasions. They can be seen on any river bed.

New Zealand Dotterel (*Charadrius obscurus*) (E)

A few were seen at Mangere Inlet followed by more at Waipu estuary totalling twenty birds and another two on the beach near Waiwera.

Wrybill (*Anarhynchus frontalis*) (E)

A flock of about 450 were seen in the Mangere Inlet and although they breed in the south on riverbeds we never saw anymore despite extensive searching of braided rivers on South Island. They obviously had not yet returned from their North Island wintering grounds.

Ruddy Turnstone (*Arenaria interpres*)

A single on the rocks on our penultimate day.

Bar-tailed Godwit (*Limosa lapponica*)

Over 100 were in the Mangere Inlet, six in the Waipara estuary and 15 there on our second visit.

Black-tailed Godwit (*Limosa limosa*)

A single with the flock of 15 of the previous species came as a surprise.

Whimbrel (*Numenius phaeopus*)

A single on the beach at Waipara on our second visit.

Black-backed Gull (Kelp Gull) (*Larus dominicanus*)

Very common both on the coast and inland.

Red-billed Gull (*Larus novaehollandiae*)

Commonly found in all suitable locations including outside restaurants.

Black-billed Gull (*Larus bulleri*) (E)

Nothing like as common as the previous species and found more inland than on the coast although in the South there were plenty in coastal locations.

Caspian Tern (*Sterna caspia*)

Seen on four dates with a maxima of 15 in the Mangere Inlet and ten in the estuaries just north of Christchurch

White-fronted Tern (*Sterna striata*)

The commonest tern of the region and seen virtually on a daily basis with numbers sometimes exceeding well over 100 and a maximum of 6-700 in the Waipura and Amberley estuaries.

Black-fronted Tern (*Sterna albobriata*) (E)

Commonly found on braided rivers with counts of 50 or more. Small numbers were also seen out at sea and coastal locations

Fairy Tern (*Sterna nereis davisae*)

A pair was seen in the Waipu Estuary. There are only about 15 pairs breeding in the whole of New Zealand so we were lucky to find a couple of birds. Although the species breeds in Australia, this is the endangered NZ subspecies.

New Zealand Pigeon (*Hemiphaga novaeseelandiae*) (E)

Between one and ten on nine dates

Barbary Dove (*Streptopelia roseogrisea*)

One and two seen in Auckland.

Spotted Dove (*Streptopelia chinensis*)

One seen in Auckland on our first day.

Rock Dove (*Columba livia*)

The only ones one might give credence to were nesting on cliffs at Nugget Point.

Kea (*Nestor notabilis*) (E)

Singles at Fox Glacier and Haast Pass, both flying over affording not brilliant views.

Kaka (*Nestor meridionalis*) (E)



Two or three in the Pureora Forest (N) and up to 15 on Stewart/Ulva Island.

Eastern Rosella (*Platycercus eximius*)

Locally a common Australian introduction and three and six were seen in the Auckland area on the first two days.

Yellow-crowned Parakeet (*Cyanoramphus auriceps*) (E)

Two were seen in the Pureora Forest and three on Ulva Island.

Red-crowned Parakeet (*Cyanoramphus novaezelandiae*) (E)

About a dozen were seen both on Tiritiri Mantangi and Ulva Island

Morepork (*Ninox novaeseelandiae*) (E)

Only encountered in North Island with one or two heard over the first four nights but one sat within yards of the balcony of the Te Kauri Lodge giving stunning views and excellent photo opportunities.

Kingfisher (*Halcyon sancta*)

Very common on North Island with 30 seen on the first day alone, whilst in the South there were only three singles.

Welcome Swallow (*Hirundo tahitica*)

Small numbers throughout.

Rifleman (*Acanthisitta chloris*) (E)

Four in the Pureora Forest and a single in Haast Pass were the only records.

Silvereye (*Zosterops lateralis*)

Found in small flocks throughout with a maximum daily count of 25.

Grey Warbler (*Gerygone igata*) (E)

A vocal species and more often heard than seen. Up to six on a virtually daily basis.

Blackbird (*Turdus merula*)

Abundant

Songthrush (*Turdus philomelos*)

Even more abundant.

Dunnock (*Prunella modularis*)

Most common;y encountered in the far south east of South Island on the coastal headlands. Two were also found on Ulva Island which was thought, until today, not to have any introduced species.

Skylark (*Alauda arvensis*)

Common throughout.

New Zealand Pipit (Richard's Pipit) (*Anthus novaeseelandiae*)

More work is required on the taxonomy of this species and it seems likely that the Australasian pipit will be elevated to attain full species status. Just three birds were seen near the te Kauri Lodge.

Fernbird (*Bowdleria punctata*) (E)

Fantastic views were had of two birds in the reeds fringing Lake Taupo.

Brown Creeper (*Mohoua novaeseelandiae*) (E)

Eight were seen near Haast Pass and a dozen or so on Ulva Island.

Whitehead (*Mohoua albicilla*) (E)

About 15 on Tiritiri Mantangi and one heard in the Pureora Forest.

Yellowhead (*Mohoua ochrocephala*) (E)

A single at Haast Pass and two on Ulva Island were the only records.

Fantail (*Rhipidura fuliginosa*)

Commonly found in all suitable habitat. Both the Pied and Black phases were seen.

Tomtit (*Petroica macrocephala*)

Both NI and SI races were seen in ones and twos on several days with a maximum of five on Ulva

New Zealand Robin (*Petroica australis*) (E)

Two seen and one heard on NI and a female near Haast Pass and then nine birds on Ulva Island where they are thriving.



South Island New Zealand Robin

(Kokako (*Callaeas cinerea*) **(E)**

A single was heard on Tiritiri Mantangi and a big grey bird diving into the trees on the other side of the valley was almost certainly this species but not seen well enough to be counted on the list.

Tui (*Prothemadera novaeseelandiae*) **(E)**

Commonly found throughout with a maximum of 60 on Tiritiri Mantangi

Stitchbird (*Notiomystis cincta*) **(E)**

About 20 on Tiritiri Mantangi were the only sightings

Bellbird (*Anthornis melanura*) **(E)**

Two and threes seen in many places but there were 30 or more on Tiritiri Mantangi

Saddleback (*Philesturnus carunculatus*) **(E)**

Divided into two races also. About a dozen of the northern race were seen on Tiritiri Mantangi and eight of the southern race were seen on Ulva

House Sparrow (*Passer domesticus*)

Present in small numbers in all areas

Chaffinch (*Fringilla coelebs*)

One of the commonest passerines in New Zealand

Redpoll (*Carduelis flammea*)

One and twos in the southern half of South Island and Stewart Island. One was also discovered on Ulva island which is not supposed to have any introduced species.

Goldfinch (*Carduelis carduelis*)

Also commonly found in all areas.

Greenfinch (*Carduelis chloris*)

Also common often found in mixed flocks with the previous two species.

Yellowhammer (*Emberiza citrinella*)

Far more common here than at home.

Starling (*Sturnus vulgaris*)

Abundant.

Australian Magpie (*Gymnorhina tibicen*)

Ubiquitous

Common Myna (*Acridotheres tristis*)

A few seen in the Auckland area.

MAMMALS

Sperm Whale (*Physeter macrocephalus*)

About 15 off Kaikoura

Minke Whale (*Balaenoptera acutorostrata*)

A single in the Hauraki Gulf

Common Dolphin (Short-beaked Common Dolphin) (*Delphinus delphis*)

About 20 in the Hauraki Gulf

Dusky Dolphin (*Lagenorhynchus obscurus*)

Ten and two off Kaikoura

Bottle-nosed Dolphin (*Tursiops truncatus*)

Two in the Hauraki Gulf

Hectors Dolphin (*Cephalorhynchus hectori*)

Pods of 12 and 15 off Kaikoura

Leopard Seal (*Hydrurga leptonyx*)

One on the beach at night on Stewart Island

New Zealand Fur Seal (*Arctocephalus forsteri*)

Commonly found in large numbers on rocks and also often seen miles out at sea

Hooker's Sea Lion (*Phocarctos hookeri*)

Six on the beach at Waipapa Point

Brush-tailed Possum (*Trichosurus vulpecula*)

A single at night near the te Kauri Lodge and many road casualties

Rabbit (*Oryctolagus cuniculus*)

A few here and there

Hare (*Lepus capensis*)

Two or three on two days in the Twizel area



New Zealand Fur Seal

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