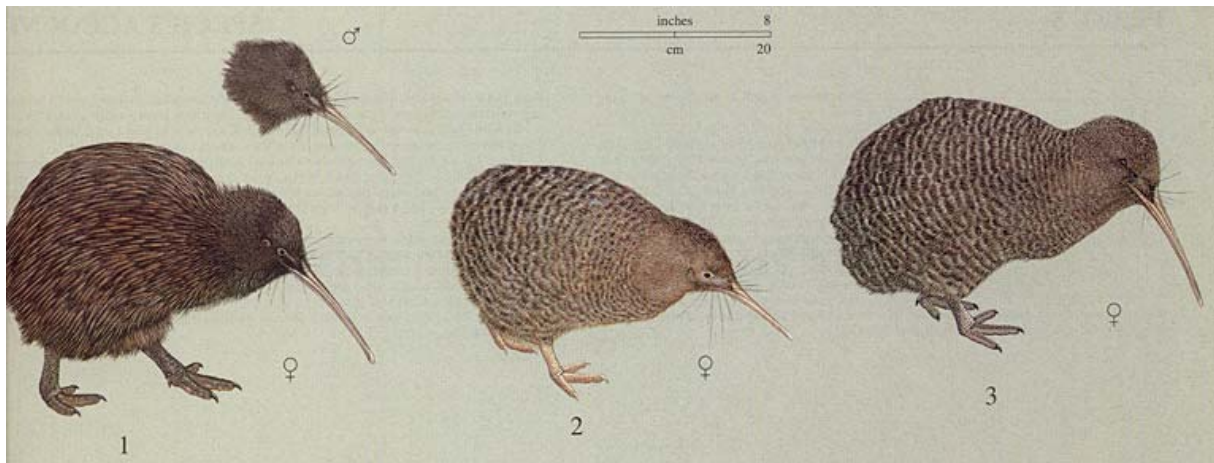


# Singapore, Australia and New Zealand

## Trip Report

August 17- September 16, 2001



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## **Birding New Zealand** (inspired by the Fatbirder website - <http://www.fatbirder.com>)

To appreciate bird watching in New Zealand one has to understand a little of New Zealand's background. With the destruction of New Zealand's lowland bush, dense jungle like forest, which began with the arrival here of the Polynesians a thousand years ago and was accelerated by the arrival of Europeans a couple of hundred years ago, went a good many of New Zealand's unique birds, such as the Moa and the Huia.



Before humans arrived in this country bringing introduced predators with them, New Zealand was a Paradise for birds. Birds ruled the land and they evolved in unique ways. Some, such as the extinct Moa, were huge – 4 meters tall, many lost the power of flight and became nocturnal, such as Kiwi and Kakapo. As a result, New Zealand has 3 unique families of birds found nowhere else in the world.

Although New Zealand is still a heavily forested country in the remote and mountainous areas, these forests are infested with introduced animals such as goats, deer, rats and the Australian brush tailed possum, that pose a real threat to New Zealand's remaining endemic birds.

Until recently, it was thought that the only way to preserve New Zealand's unique bird life was to re-establish them on pest free offshore islands. This idea has now been extended to create "mainland islands" within the vast conservation estate. Hopefully this strategy will reverse the decline. Certainly it is New Zealand's biodiversity strategy to reverse the decline by the year 2020. As the native birds decline, the ecological niches are being filled by birds that somehow, and not always with human assistance, just arrive here.

Few New Zealanders even get to see a Kiwi, let alone a Kokako or Kakapo. In most of the settled areas one sees introduced birds such as blackbirds, thrushes and finches. Local birdwatchers, however, do not despise these birds. They have so few birds compared with, say, Australia. Every one of them is valued but mynas, *Acridotheres tristis*, and magpies, *Gymnorhina tibicen*, not easy to defend. To observe New Zealand's endemic bird life one has to either visit the offshore islands or visit the Conservation Estate. Information about this is to be found on the New Zealand Department of Conservation website (<http://www.doc.govt.nz/>).



Aotearoa  
New Zealand

North Island

WHANGAREI  
AUCKLAND  
TAURANGA  
HAMILTON  
ROTORUA  
TAUPO  
NEW PLYMOUTH  
SISBOURNE  
WANGANUI  
NAPIER  
PALMERSTON NORTH  
NELSON  
WELLINGTON  
PICTON

South Island

WESTPORT  
GREYMOUTH  
KAIKOURA  
FRANK JOSEF  
MT COOK  
CHRISTCHURCH  
MILFORD SOUND  
WANAKA  
TIMARU  
TE ANAU  
QUEENSTOWN  
DANARU  
DUNEDIN  
INVERCARGILL  
STEWART ISLAND



## Day by day.

### August 17 Brussels - Singapore

Flight from Brussels, with Singapore Airlines. Lasting 12 hours but nice crew, nice meals.

### August 18 - Singapore

Entire day with Victor Yue, moderator of the Birds-pix mailing list. We spent the morning on Pulau Ubin island, where we got by boat from North Singapore. Pulau Ubin, an island off the northeastern coast of Singapore has a land area of 1019 hectares. It is shaped like a boomerang, about 8 km at its greatest length while its breadth varies from 1.3 to 1.7 km.



Essentially, Ubin is a large granite crop rising from the sea to a maximum height of 75m (Puaka Hill). Islets, Pulau Ketam and Pulau Sekudu, lie to its south. The island is a rich resource of granite, the reason why Ubin is also known as the 'Stone Mountain'.

Since the middle of the last century, granite mining has supported settlers and numerous cottage industries. You can find a number of abandoned granite quarries filled up with water. Still, about 200 inhabitants call Ubin their home, making a living off the land or relying on weekend visitors to support a quiet tourist trade.

Pulau Ubin has unending natural intrigues.

Newly-hatched fishes, prawns, crabs and all kinds of burrowing creatures find their home by the mangroves which make up most of the coastline. See the mangrove plants surviving the seawater with the help of their aerial roots.

Away from the coastline, secondary forests are interspersed by small rubber plantations and coconut groves. You may be fortunate enough to chance upon abandoned gardens and farms with trees laden with local fruits such as durian, rambutan and chempedak.

To enjoy the natural vegetation and the laidback kampong atmosphere, you should try leisure walking or cycling. Bicycles can also be rented at the village. The trails have been upgraded to facilitate trekking and basic amenities like toilets and shelters are available for the convenience of visitors.

When I arrived at the Changi Airport, Victor was wearing his bins around his neck.

My first two lifers were the local "trash birds" : the Javan Mynah and Common Mynah.

### *Pulau Ubin*

After a short ride, we were at the jetty of Pulau Ubin. Perched on the back branches of a dying mangrove tree next to the jetty was the Olive-backed Sunbird.

Hopefully, I did not feel very concerned by Mosquitoes as I scanned the trees for the birds where the calls were coming from. A call from the woodpecker started us searching for it. We were rewarded with a Laced Woodpecker. Further down the walk, a Spotted Dove flew to the top of the coconut tree. As we walked to the seaside, where a buddhist temple was now just flat ground (the whole stretch of farmland are in the process of being developed), we spotted a pair of the Long-tailed Parakeets with a nest in the hole of the tree branch. Just as we walked into a patch of wild ferns, a Red Jungle Fowl was found walking along the path we were taking. Quickly it sensed our presence and walked into the ferns.

As we walked by the former crab ponds, I spotted a Red Shank taking off. Just as we were reaching the disused sluice gate, there were two Black-headed Munia feeding on the seeds of the grass.

The Collared Kingfisher kept calling but was illusive. We could not see it yet.

There was another call that was familiar to Victor. It was the Oriental Pied Hornbill, a pair of which was sighted in this island earlier. I to see it as it flew from a coconut tree.

We passed the former island headman's house. He waved at us. He used to have his 'mini-zoo' at his place. Victor told me he refused to live on mainland Singapore despite persuasions from his children. Not wanting to disturb him, we only took a peek at the side gate where there was a Red Jungle Fowl and the bat next to it.



As we walked into the disused rubber plantation, we heard a call that Victor could not identify. Just as we were closing into where the sound is with our binos, the bird, rather big and dark flew into the undergrowth. we followed, but it was no where to be seen, and it did not call again.

We decided to take this path and at another disused prawn/crab pond, a Common Sandpiper flew away, landing on a floating platform. This time, I got some success with my digiscoping (without any tripod...).

The heat was getting harsher and we perspired as we walked now in the open tracks flanked by the ponds. As we passed by a pond, we spotted the Blue-throated Bee-eater.

We were in the shade of the old rubber plantation again, with grassland nearby. Asian Glossy Starlings were feeding on one tree while another Scarlet-backed Flower Pecker flew from one branch to another in another tree.

As we were on our return to the jetty, we spotted a huge untidy nest on top of a tall tree. Just then, an American caught up on his bike asking if we saw the Great Hornbill (he later told Victor that it was actually the Oriental Pied Hornbill).

Since I said to Victor that I could eat anything, we decided on the Indian restaurant as it was also along the way to our next birding destination. We had Fish Head Curry and Masala Chicken with Bryani rice and lots of Lime Juice. It was a good cool break in the air-conditioned restaurant from the probably 32-34 degree centigrade outdoor.

After an hour's break, we were off again, this time to the Sungei Buloh Nature Park. Although it is not the migration season yet, we hoped to see at least something.

### ***Sungei Buloh Nature Park***

A quick check into the sighting log showed that there were already some shorebirds.

We went to the main pond, the hide which was just after the bridge over the Sungei Buloh (Sungei is Rive in Malay) from the visitor centre. At the distant mudflat, I identified the Pacific Golden Plover, Mongolian Plover and the Green Shank. It was too difficult to identify the distant birds and, moreover, ... there was a family party in the hide!

We decided to take one of the routes in the park. There, I took pictures of Dragonflies and Grasshoppers too! Our next bird was the Pied Fantail, quickly followed by the Ashy Tailorbird. Scanning on the river bank, we spotted a huge lazy Water Monitor Lizard. I thought, for a moment, that it was a crocodile! There are actually many such lizards in the park.

At another boardwalk to another river, Victor spotted a Dollar Bird while I was zooming into a log where there stood a Grey Heron and a Purple Heron. After a first Striated Heron, we kept seeing this species too. Just when we thought that things were going to be quiet, in flew two Oriental Magpie

Robins. These robins seem to be making a comeback, and this bird is one of the popular local caged birds.

As I was interested in the Mangrove Arboretum, we took the route to this part which has a boardwalk, and it was still under repair. Luckily for us, the repair was almost complete and we could walk the whole stretched. My attention was caught by the Mudskipper, as a new target for digiscoping. So deep was my concentration that I did not realise a swarm of ants climbing on to my arm. This time, the Collared Kingfisher did appear.

It was almost six when we returned to visitor centre. As we sat in the cafeteria for a drink and Victor was telling me about the White-breasted Waterhen when just in front of us, on the pond, was this young waterhen standing very still on a lotus leave. Apparently this bird was very familiar with the cafeteria. It even walked around the chairs, oblivious to the occupants.



Just as we were moving off, we saw a flock of Javan Munias resting on a Singapore Rhododendran. I could not resist the temptation. With my binox and CoolPix, I went to work, much to the amusement of the park ranger.

Jet lag and not enough sleep was catching up on me as we sped back to the airport. It was almost 12 hours of walking in the heat. We decided to skip a seafood dinner - chilli crab is Singapore's famous dish - which Victor promised me months in advance. So, we ended up in the Airport's kopitiam [Coffee Shop in Hokkien (Fujian), a southern Chinese dialect], where Victor introduced me the local Chinese Prawn Noodles and Singapore's famous *Tiger Beer*.

After I had completed writing down the list of lifers I had in this visit, it was time for me to check in. At 8.00pm, some 12 hours since my arrival, I went through the immigration for my next flight to Brisbane, Australia.

### **August 19. Singapore – Gladstone (AU)**

Sunny Wheather.

During a short walk along the marina and around a little pond of freshwater a few hundreds meters from the sea, I saw many new species : Sacred Ibis, Masked Lapwing and Australian Magpie Lark feeding in a small Park ; Little Pied Cormorants, Australian Pelicans, Pied Stilts, Australian Avocet, Red-capped Plovers in the pond. Back in the city, I spotted beautiful Figbirds singing around the Marina, and lots of Brown Honeyeater, obviously common around here. Silver Gulls, Welcome Swallows, Blue-faced Honeyeater and Azure Kingfisher were also present around the harbour.

At dust, I found an impressive roosting place of Rainbow Lorikeets. I counted at least 3000 birds coming back for the night.

### **August 20-24. Gladstone – Heron Island (AU)**

I spent the next morning in Gladstone, with many Silver Gulls, and Welcome Swallows in the marina.

Around 10 :00 AM, I left for the two hours trip to Heron Island on the Coral Reef. The crossing was pretty quite, but arriving on the Coral Reef, large flocks of White-fronted Noddies were flying here

and there over the deep blue sea. Arriving in the old harbour, we observed 5 Brown Boobies. Black-naped Terns and Great Crested Terns were also resting on the shipwreck in the Island harbour.



Heron Island is a coral cay in the heart of the Great Barrier Reef. It is 72 kilometres off the Queensland coast and is reached by catamaran, as I did, or by helicopter (in 30 minutes..) from Gladstone. The small island has an unforgettable tropical village atmosphere and lots of tropical birds nesting within the small town.

Thousands of White-fronted Noddy were resting in the trees of the island (estimated breeding population : 30.000 birds). The birds nest on the lowest branches of the trees, forming noisy colonies. You could even touch them ! The trees of the island are jam-packed with birds; so packed that a walk through the island's forest inevitably results in a collection of bird guano and almost every visitor gets bombed at least once during a stay.

Black Noddy leave the nest in the early morning, they reach their fishing grounds and the first are back in the colony around 10:00 AM, all birds returning from the sea at sunset.

Many Buff-banded Rails are also nesting on the island, walking here and there during the hottest hours of the day. They are particularly abundant in the forest.

Few passerines can be observed on the reef barrier: Silvereyes, Fantails, and the elusive Black-faced Cuckoo Shrike that I luckily spotted on August 22 and 24. Bar-shouldered Doves are nesting in the village, as was apparently the Black-faced Cuckoo-Shrike. Nearly all Silvereyes are banded on the island, as are the Buff-banded Rails. These bird species have been extensively studied by the University of Queensland's Research Center. During a bird-walk organized by the Heron Island Resort, I also got nice sights of a Sacred Kingfisher in the forest.

Of course, lots of Silver Gulls, some Lesser Crested Terns and Black-naped Terns were fishing around the island, in particular in the early morning.

The eastern-most and remotest part of the island, Shark Bay, is perfect for a romantic picnic or just lazing away the afternoon with a good book. The sand is white, the water warm, and the solitude absolute. Sharks are supposed to be more active at dawn, and you're then supposed to avoid snorkeling at this time of the day. Snorkeling gear and wetsuits are available for hire also at a modest cost. To snorkel on the outside perimeter of the coral cay, snorkeling boats start in the morning and afternoon to the best places around the reef. Just where sharks use to go fishing. The Barrier Reef is also home to more than 1,800 commonly seen species and up to 4,000 known species of fish. Schools of Surgeon Fish, Tiger Fish, Jacks, Spadefish, Snappers, and Moray Eels.



The Giant Turtles begin laying their eggs in November, and this is usually the month for the annual synchronised mass spawning of corals, an event that really stimulates the fish activity. I spotted a few turtles swimming however, during the two snorkeling trips I took outside the coral cay.

During the following days, I got the same birds, together with some additional migrants such as the Lesser Sand Plovers, American Golden Plovers, and Ruddy Turnstones. I also observed – at very close range - two impressive 2-meters long Black-tipped Reef Sharks while snorkeling, and two Dolphins (species unknown ?).

#### **August 24. Heron Island – Gladstone (AU)**

More Boobies were resting on the shipwreck in the harbour ; thousands of Terns were still feeding at sea... Soon before sunset, I visited again the large Lorikeet roosting place in ‘downtown’ Gladstone. Lots of Australian Magpies were also seen in town, singing late after sunset.

#### **August 25. Gladstone – Brisbane – Christchurch (NZ)**

I had just a few minutes for birding today. Lots of Blackbirds were welcoming me when I arrived in Christchurch in the evening. A few Chaffinches too. But no endemic species... yet.

#### **August 26. Christchurch and Lyttletown (NZ)**

Poor weather conditions. I spent this first morning in New Zealand in Hagley and the Botanical Gardens. Nearly immediatly I got my first endemic species: Red-billed and Black-billed Gulls at a crossroad in downtown Christchurch. The Gardens provide the green for the city and the major schools that border these seem to add to the traditionally English feel of the place. Red brick houses, gothic style buildings and immaculately trimmed garden edges without fences, walls and wire provide an insight into the incredibly tranquil and peaceful way of life in this city.

In the Botanical Garden, I saw mostly introduced european passerines : Dunnocks, Chaffinches, Greenfinches, Goldfinches, Blackbirds, Song Trushes. Late in the morning, in the bushes, Silvereyes and Fantails were feeding, together with a few Australasian Magpies and ... a Grey Warbler ! A small colony of Little Pied Cormorant recently started here, with 5 Great Cormorants, and about 20 New Zealand Scaups. I also saw my first and huge New Zealand Pigeon in the Gardens.



In the afternoon, I rented a red Toyota Festiva car and went to Lyttletown: there was a first ‘Pukeko’ (Purple Swamphen) in the fields, and then Black-backed Gulls in the harbour. The Lyttleton Timeball Station offered nice views on the harbour. It’s a stone castle-like building, clearly visible from most parts of the town. From 1876 to 1934, a ball dropped from its mast at 1 PM. The timeball apparatus came from the well-known german firm Siemens Bros, and the astronomical clock from from Edward Dent, who had made the famous Big Ben clock. Use of the timeball was discontinued in 1934 when it was replaced by radio signals, though flag signals

continued until 1941. The flags, which predated the Timeball Station, were used on the flagstaff nearby to signal to ships and to communicate shipping advice to the town.

Finally, Yellowhammers and Skylarks finished the day along the Summit road in the surrounding hills. Interestingly, three Australasian Harriers, including a young bird, were seen gliding in the mist along the same road.

### **August 27. Christchurch – Arthur’s Pass - Okarito (NZ)**

Nice sunny day. The first endemic was the Paradise Shelduck, apparently common in the flooded plains all along the Southern Alps valleys.

Excitingly, I also got my first Kea at the very end of the Otira Valley. The bird was heard, then I saw tracks in the snow and finally saw this ‘Mountain Parrot’. A few hours later, I actually got a flock of 5 birds at the ‘Death Corner Lookout’, feeded by tourists despite the clear indications.



Arriving on the West Coast in the afternoon, I enjoyed the wonderful tropical atmosphere, with lots of Tui heard in the canopy. Groups of nesting Black Swans, together with an Australasian Shoveler were also spotted along the main road [1].

A few moments later, I also got a Morepork in flight at the entrance of the Westland Ntl Park. Later on, I searched for the Kiwi on the road to Okarito, but no luck. Night at the Okarito Youth Hostel.

### **August 28. Okarito –Arthur’s Pass - Christchurch (NZ)**

This was going to be a wonderful day in the Rainforest around the Franz Jozef Glacier. Highlights were the endemic Tui and Bellbirds in the deepest parts of the forest, together with the Grey Ducks and New Zealand Scaup on the lake at the entrance of the Westland Natl Park. In the morning, White-headed Heron were feeding in the Okarito lagune. A little black Cormorant in the lagune. A Black Kite (! a rare bird for NZ) and Canada Goose were then seen along the road [72]. At night, no White Heron, and no Kiwi were seen or heard, despite the intensive search in suitable habitats, as indicated by road signs.

### **August 29/30. Working days in Christchurch (NZ)**

New Zealand Scaups and a few other common species.

### **August 31. Christchurch (NZ).**

This was my long-awaited birding day around lake Ellesmere with Nick Allen. I enjoyed several new species, with lots of european passerines, and a particularly large flock of Wrybills. Approximately a hundred of these asymmetrical birds were resting on the muddy plain, and we got nice close views on them. Many cormorants were on and around the lake, of all species but the Spotted.

We left Christchurch to reach the Banks Peninsula, a picturesque place, very hilly with mainly gravel roads. Many little bays the peninsula, but we went closer to the south coast, to lake Ellesmere. Over the hill from Christchurch is Lyttelton Harbour, and slightly further away is Akaroa, where we went later on during this trip (see below).

Bittern were singing here and there in a large marsh, where we also spotted a two Spoonbills at dawn. Hundreds of Black Swans are breeding there, as they are on the Lake Ellesmere.

Night in the car in Christchurch.

### **September 1. Christchurch - Kaikoura – Picton (NZ).**



Heavy rain all day. In the morning, I got a few new species however, including the endemic Spotted Shag and Variable Oystercatcher, along the coast. At noon, I reached Kaikoura, New Zealand, famous for whales and dolphins and definitely one of the world's most exciting areas for pelagic birds. Within close proximity of the beautiful Kaikoura Peninsula, these trips offer a considerable array of albatross, petrels, shearwaters, terns, shags and gulls. Giant Northern Petrel and Cape Petrel were already seen from the seal colony on Kaikoura Peninsula, together with endemic Spotted Shags and Variable Oystercatchers again.

Deadly sick during the pelagic trip in Kaikoura (60 NZ \$); Wonderful experience, however, with 6 species of Albatrosses, Fairy Prions, Petrels, etc. See list.

The next 3 hours, I estimated at least 500 Cape Petrels, 4 Royal, 3 Wandering, 2 Shy, 3 Buller's and 3 Black-browed Albatrosses, 2 Grey Petrels and 1 Westland Black Petrel were round the boat, some almost close enough to touch (and readily photographed with a standard numeric camera lens). It was a magical experience, and I was deadly sick but sorry when the final net had been reset, and we turned for home, although the return journey was just as memorable with a small pod of dolphins riding the bow wave inches from where we were sitting for a few minutes.

Despite the fact that Kaikoura is well served with places to stay, from Motor Inn to Backpacker accommodation, the weather was not improving and I decided to spend the night in the car ... in Picton.

### **September 2. Picton – Nelson (NZ).**

Morning along the Queen Charlotte scenic road. Pukeko, Paradise Shelducks, Gulls, Bellbirds, 2 NZ Pigeons eating in the bush. A pied Oystercatcher, and a flock of Tui.



Trip to Motuara Island with Les and Zoe Battersby. Wonderful. Kiwi was reintroduced here. Current population estimated at 20 birds. Kiwi footprints are about the size of a domestic hen and are often found in mud or snow. Probe-holes made by the kiwi's bill usually occur in groups and look like a screwdriver has been pushed into the ground, rotated and pulled out again. They are about 10 cm deep.

5 Saddleback, including young birds, Blue Penguin in the nestbox, NZ Pigeons, Lots of Bellbirds, and tame NZ Robins. All banded. Seven Saddlebacks.

King Shag colony at sunset; about 50 on White Rocks and 17 birds at the newly discovered colony (22 birds). Huge numbers of Fluttering Shearwaters in the Sound, together with 2 Diving Petrels.

Night in the car in Nelson.

### **September 3. Nelson – Punakaiki - Arthur's Pass (NZ).**

Usual forest birds in the morning. In the Paparoa National Park, at Punakaiki, Pancake Rocks and Blowholes offer a wonderful walk along the coast. They are at their best around high tide with a strong sea. A huge Spotted Shag colony can also be spotted from the northern part of the Park.

A stop on the Truman track is also highly recommended. It consists in a nice stroll through coastal forest to a beach with caves and a waterfall.

A few miles further down road [6], along the Punakaiki River, I got a few Purple Swamphen (Pukeko) but no Blue Duck. Some Paradise Shelducks were also feeding along the river. This highly scenic valley is certainly worth a walk, and is surrounded by a primitive tropical forest.

After a brief look at the pancake rocks at Punakaiki, where Westland Black Petrels were obviously gathering offshore, I waited by the road [6] south of Punakaiki River to witness the petrels returning to their burrows. I saw at least 1000 of these extremely rare birds back from the sea !!

Later on, I drove north to Bullock Creek, where about 8 Morepork were heard. Despite a long walk in the dark, I did not get a Great Spotted Kiwi... yet.

Back to Arthur's Pass, I stopped at the Car park just above the long viaduc on road [73] to try my luck for the Brown Kiwi. No more luck, but another Morepork was singing there.

Night in the car in Arthur's Pass.

#### **September 4. Arthur's Pass - Christchurch (NZ).**

Walk to Temple Basin. 4 Keas were incredibly tame, eating my laces. No Rock Wren, but a NZ Pipit alarming around the public shelter.

My first Riffleman was spotted a few hours later, behind the visitor center in Arthur's Pass village.

For the second walk of the day, I chose Bealey track, just after Arthur's Pass Ntl Park. Lot's of Riffleman in the forest, together with Tomtits, Redpolls, Grey Warbler, and a flock of seven Brown Creeper ! Stunning views on the Edwards and Mingha Rivers valleys up there.

On the way to Christchurch, a quick stop at Pearson lake provided the Australasian Crested Grebe, still needed. My friend Benoit joined me tonight, arriving from Belgium after a 24 hours-long flight.

Night at the ... B&B.

#### **September 5. Christchurch - Twizel (NZ).**

Long drive in the morning. Provides good views on a NZ Pigeon, and the usual introduced passerines, Gulls and Wattled Plovers.

On the Tekapo Lake, we got close views on Black-billed Gulls, and one Little Black Cormorant.

On its west side, on the small Mc Gregor Lake, located along the Godley Peaks Road, we luckily got one adult Black Stilt (Kaki) alarming.



This critically endangered bird, once common throughout New Zealand, is now restricted to the braided rivers and wetlands of the Mackenzie Basin. It is not easily seen in the wild but since 1981, when the bird was recognized as one of the rarest wading bird in the world, it has been intensively managed at the Twizel Kaki Center. In an effort to increase the survival rate of offspring, eggs are now removed from nests in the wild to avoid predation. The parents continue to sit on substituted ceramic eggs until the day before hatching when some of the eggs are

returned to them. Their other eggs are incubated and hatched at the Kaki aviary, where puppets parents are used to brood them. Once juveniles are ready to leave the nest, they are put into outside aviaries, where they learn to feed themselves from small streams. Most of these chicks are kept over winter and released when they are 9-months old.

Lots of Black Swans, Paradise Shelducks, two Australasian Crested Grebes, and a flock of NZ Scaup were observed on the same Mc Gregor Lake. About 20 Australasian Shovelers were also feeding at the same place. Further to Alexandrina Lake, with 250 Coots, 5 Australasian Crested Grebes, and another flock of NZ Scaups. Some mallards. A family of Canada Geese.

Twizel provided some interesting birds: two Pied Oystercatchers, Australasian Magpies everywhere, Black-billed Gulls and Paradise Shelducks. In the evening, we hired a rod for \$2 at the Hardware Store and experimented salmon fishing at dawn, but no luck.. Night in the car.

### **September 6. Twizel - Dunedin – Kaka Point (NZ).**

Showers in the morning then fine weather.

Some more fishing at sunrise. No way. We got up to 7 Australasian Grebes, and the same adult Black Stilt in the early morning. Lots of NZ Scaups were seen on the lakes separating Twizel from Dunedin, and a few White-headed Herons, together with Pied Stilts in the smallest ponds. Along the Dunedin Peninsula, at low tide, we also counted 26 Variable Oystercatchers.

We visit at the Royal Albatross Center (18\$), where two 9-months old young Royal Albatrosses were welcoming an adult back from the sea. An impressive Stewart Island Shag colony can be spotted from the same hide, with lots of nests. From the parking lot, we got a Northern Giant Petrel gliding over the sea, and very close views on the Spotted Shag colony where hundreds of birds were already incubating.

Then, we rushed to the last tour of the day at the 'Penguin Place'. This reserve is a private conservation effort to save the world's most endangered penguin from extinction and is funded entirely through profits from this tour operation. The 'Penguin Place' offers a long tour (\$25) from a system of hides and tunnels, under the close supervision of a local guide. We counted 16 birds in the artificial nests, and got very close views and photographs of undisturbed birds, but ... the guide was in a hurry. Finally, we drove to Kaka Point, where wild Yellow-eyed Penguins are frequently reported, and spent the night at the nice Kaka Cottage.



### **September 7. Kaka Point - Bluff (NZ).**

Fine weather. I woke up early today, and drove to Nugget Point to try to picture some more penguins. Arriving at 6:30 AM at the hide, I rapidly decided to scan the beaches instead of staying there. I got 11 Yellow-eyed Penguins on their way to the sea.

Along the scenic road to Bluff: a few Fur Seals and finally one female Sea Lion. A male was also briefly observed at the very left side of the beach



in Cannibal Bay. Cannibal Bay, named by geologist Dr James Hector after human bones were discovered in the dunes, also provided one Northern Giant Petrel, many Black-backed Gulls and Red-billed Gulls.

Last walk of the day to the McLean Falls (20 min. one way). Nice landscape, and one Bellbird, together with a few Tomtits producing their typical loud jingling bursts in the canopy.

Late in the evening, we arrived in Bluff, at the bottom of the South Island, New Zealand, in the province of Southland and is the Gateway to Stewart island. During the last walk of the day, along the southeast track on South Island, thus just in front of Stewart Is., we met Wendy Shingler, who joined us for the four following days...

### **September 8. Bluff – Halfmoon Bay (Stewart Island) (NZ).**

Fine weather.

In the early morning, we embarked on a private boat hired by a team of seven new zealand hunters. Most people, however, cross the detroit via the 'Foveaux Express', and it's sister catamaran 'Southern Express' leaving from Bluff. There are morning and afternoon sailings twice daily, most days of the year, and the ferry lands at the Halfmoon Bay wharf, just five minutes walk from the Pub.

When travelling here, leave pretention, surplus baggage, and your sense of time behind.

Weather is changeable - bring sensible outdoor clothing and footwear. Forget the fancy clothes - locals take anyone wearing a suit in the bar for a politician - and expect them to shout the drinks.

Wear a dinner jacket, and they'll take you for a penguin, and gently, but firmly, toss you back in the tide. Keep baggage to a minimum.



During the crossing, two Bullers Albatross were spotted from the boat, then about 10 Cape Pigeons and 2 Diving-petrels. Later, two Northern Giant Petrels were eating a dead seal.

We also got a Stewart Is Shag welcoming us in Halfmoon bay, the second observation of this species after the colony on mainland South Is. Lots of Kaka were flying in town. Tui and Bellbirds were heard here and there occasionally.

Stewart Island is a 20 minute flight from Invercargill or an hour by ferry from Bluff. The settlement of Halfmoon Bay has a general store, Department of Conservation Visitor Centre and a variety of accommodation including hotel, motel, lodge and backpacker accommodation. There are a variety of tracks suitable for day walks.

The tall forest trees around Halfmoon Bay are mainly kamahi and rimu. Rimu, miro and totara provided timber for the early settlers. Kamahi is the most common tree, with its spreading trunk blotched a whitish colour, and its leaves toothed and slightly waved. Rata is also widespread and in summer it is readily identified by its bright crossing, ed flowers. The forest understorey is composed of lancewood, coprosmas, treeferns and broadleaf. Fuchsia is common around Halfmoon Bay and is one of New Zealand's few deciduous trees. It has pale, loose, papery bark and handsome pendulous purple flowers. The nectar is a favourite food for Tui and Bellbirds, and Pigeons feed on the Purple Fleshy Berry, known as Konini. Ferns are an attractive and prominent feature of the forest. Many varieties can be found growing on the ground or hanging from trees. For visitors arriving by boat their introduction to Stewart Island's birdlife is often the sight of Sooty Shearwaters (in summer), gulls, Buller's mollymawks, cape pigeons and little blue penguins. Not far from Halfmoon Bay, it is easy to see Bellbirds, Tui and Parakeets. Most island residents boast having these birds, as well as Fantails, Pigeons, Shining Cuckoos and even Weka, in their gardens. Summer evenings resound with the liquid

melody of Kaka high in the trees or calling across the waters of Paterson Inlet. Grey warblers sing in the forest, particularly after rain, and Tomtits are commonly encountered on the tracks. The tidal areas of Paterson Inlet, that we did not visit, host a variety of wading birds including New Zealand Dotterels, Oystercatchers, Herons and Godwits. Around the seashores close to Halfmoon Bay, particularly at Ringaringa, there is much intertidal life to be discovered in the rock pools.

Arriving in Halfmoon Bay, we rapidly found a water taxi, Seabuzz, that drove us to Freds Camp Hut for 70 NZ\$ (return trip). Overthere, we enjoyed a nice evening, and more success with our fishing experiences.

### **September 9. Halfmoon Bay – Freshwater Hut (Stewart Island) (NZ).**

Fine weather.

Long walk along the track leaving Freds Camp Hut for Freshwater Hut. Humid and slippery. First kiwi around 8 :00 AM, second one around 8 :30 AM. Heard first, then seen very closely.

The most ancient of New Zealand's birds, the kiwi evolved 70 million years ago from a flightless ancestor from the great southern continent of Gondwana. It's a member of the ratite group, and related to the ostrich, emu and rhea as well as the now extinct New Zealand moa.

This bird, even if it is not very often seen, is well known. It has given its name to New Zealanders, who are called "Kiwis" the world over. Yet all this time the bird has been a relatively secretive, nocturnal species seldom seen in the wild state.

Kiwis are relatively long - lived birds. Branding studies have not been going long enough to give a good indication of life expectancy, but 20 - 30 years is probable. Several brown and little spotted kiwis have lived in captivity for 20 years or more and one North Island brown is approaching 40.

There are two species of Kiwis in New Zealand. Brown Kiwis are found in forested areas in the North Island, Fiordland, South Westland and Stewart Island. Spotted Kiwis are found on offshore islands and forests in the North of the South Island.

There are six varieties of the kiwi; the Great Spotted, the Little Spotted, the North Island Brown, the Okarito Brown, the Stewart Island Brown and the The Haast Brown.

The Maori hunted the birds at night with the aid of dogs and torches. The skins and feathers were made up in to cloaks which were highly prized. The Maori believed that the kiwi was under special protection of the god Tane, and they called it Te manu a Tane - the bird that Tane hid.

Its voice is shrill and from the call comes its Maori name kiwi. The male utters a repeated prolonged whistling call. The female call is shorter and hoarser. During feeding they emit snuffling sounds.



Usual birds were also seen along the track : Tui, Bellbirds, One Rifleman and a Brown Creeper. An inquisitive Kaka approached while we were singing. Sadly, we got more Sandflies in the afternoon when the temp rised.

We went out for Kiwi spotting at night, when the birds call. We left the Freshwater Hut at 6 :00, when lots of Tui were singing, at dawn. The best time to listen for them is on a dark, moonless night up to two hours after dark. The call of the male kiwi is a repetitive (8-25 notes) high pitched whistle. The call of the female is a repetitive (10-20 notes) coarse rasping note.

To our surprise, many Kiwis started to call here and there. We heard at least three different males, and a female replying to a male. After two hours of patience, we walked quietly along the track and found

one (Stewart Is) Brown Kiwi feeding in the mosses. Pretty exciting, as we got our light ready and got a reasonable shot of the bird.  
Night at the Freshwater Hut.

### **September 10. Freshwater Hut – Halfmoon Bay - Tuatapere (NZ).**

Fine weather.

We left the hut at 6:00, checking the area for some new kiwis. Many of them were still calling here and there in the bush, but we did not see any. The return trip on the track did not provide any new species either but we got one more kiwi in the day light, exactly where we saw one yesterday. The bird ran away quite quickly but we manage to get some close views.

Back in the Sound, we briefly spotted a Stewart Island Shag. The return trip to Bluff was really quiet, and provides good spots on Cape pigeons and Bullers Albatrosses.  
At night, we drove to Tuatapere where we found an excellent B&B.

### **September 11. Tuatapere – Milford Sound (NZ).**

Fine weather.

We had a rather long drive to Milford Sound, including along the shore of Lake Te Anau. Wet or fine Milford is incredibly grand. Mitre Peak magnetises photographers, and the fiord's sheer cliffs excite both admiration and apprehension.

The Milford road is a stunning alpine drive. Visitors need to allow plenty of time to stop at the numerous viewing points or short walking opportunities en route, just to get out of the car and drink in the spectacular scenery and the sheer scale of the landscape. At 119km (approx. 74 miles) from Te Anau to Milford Sound the sealed road takes a minimum of 2 hours driving without allowing for stops. Motorists are advised to fill vehicles with petrol in Te Anau, although supplies are available at Gunns Camp in the Hollyford Valley and at Milford Sound.



Milford is by far the best known of all of the fiords and the only one that can be accessed by road. It is approximately 16km from the head of the fiord to the open sea, which means visitors can comfortably travel the length of the fiord to open ocean and return on one of the many cruise options available in one and a half to two hours cruising time.

A couple of Cape Barren Geese and dozens of Paradise Shelducks were feeding in the plains to Te Anau. In Te Anau, we visited the Wildlife Center, where – among other native species - we saw the fabulous Takahe. Two birds are captive

there and contribute to sensitize the general public to the conservation issues.

No other new birds in Milford Sound. The usual Tomtits, and one Kea around the Backpackers accomodations, where we stayed for the night.

### **September 12. Milford Sound – Wanaka (NZ).**

Fine weather.

We spent the entire day around Milford Sound and Te Anau Downs, on the shores on the beautiful lake with a spectacular backdrop of Mt Luxmore and the Murchison Mountains range, in search of the local species that we were still missing: the Blue Duck, Yellowhead, NZ Falcon, and Rock Wren. But no luck. The day offered great views of the mountains, the Milford Road and the heart of Fiordland National Park, part of Te Wāhipounamu - South West New Zealand World Heritage Area.  
Night in the car.

### **September 13. Wanaka - Haast (NZ).**

Fine weather.

We walked the Bridle historic Track leaving from Haast Pass in search of the Yellow-fronted Parakeet and Yellowheads. No luck again, but lots of Rifleman, and quite a few Brown Creepers. Bellbirds and Tui were still present. We also looked for the Blue Duck along the Haast River. No luck, but three Black-fronted Terns were seen pretty closely.

The road to Jackson's Bay is now tarmac all the way and is a straightforward drive. The sun had come out very nicely and we did the short walk through the trees to the far side of the headland to Ocean Beach at dawn. We looked for Fiordland Crested Penguins at the end of the Nature walk, as recommended by many reports, but – again - no luck for this interesting species, the rarest Penguin of the world.

Night at the Okuru Beach B&B.

### **September 14. Haast - Okarito (NZ).**

Cloudy, with light showers.

Ship Creek bush and beach walk. One dead Seal, and around ten Hector Dolphins.

More importantly, we got Fiordland Crested Penguins going back to the nest in in Monro Beach.

Once on the beach it is necessary to be very quiet. Walk to the south end and sit quietly in the shade. The penguins nest in burrows in the woods and you can hear them calling to each other. The penguins breed from July to December. In November many have left the breeding grounds. They will go to sea for December and January, returning here in February to molt. After the molt they return to the sea until time to breed again...

The first penguin came from the sea about 10 min. after we arrived on the beach He (or she) huddled near the cliff at the south end for some time. Be sure you are sitting back from the water and away from this cliff as the path the penguins will take into the colony is near the cliff. We finally saw a few (~10) penguins. Most came from the sea, but a few seem to come down from the nests. We were very grateful for the opportunity to see this bird.

There are about 3,000 Fiordland Crested Penguins left. The Monro Beach provided one of the best opportunities to see them in the wild but it is very important to keep protecting this colony by respecting the birds and avoiding any kind of disturbance. So – please- do not approach them!



I also added 4 Fernbirds, singing in Okarito wetlands, to our trip list.

The usual birds were seen during the walks in the rainforest, and we finished the day by a late walk in the Okarito Forest in search of the Brown Kiwi (9-11:30 PM). The Kiwi was not seen, not even heard, despite the various panels indicating that the area was a protected Kiwi habitat.

Night in the Okarito Youth Hostel.

## **September 15. Okarito - Punakaiki (NZ).**

Showers in the morning; heavy rain in the afternoon and evening.

Not too many birds today. The usual birds along road [6], including Australasian Harriers, Paradise Shelducks, and Bellbirds.

At dawn, we entered the famous Paparoa National Park. This National Park was created in 1987. Its boundaries were carefully chosen not just to protect the area's forests and minerals but also a full range of ecosystems from the mountaintops to the coast. It is a relatively small park (30,000 hectares) but is packed with variety and stunning landscapes. It is perhaps most famous for its 'Pancake Rocks' on Dolomite Point.

During its breeding season a bird that may be seen here, at dawn and dusk, is the endemic Westland black petrel. We went to the Punakaiki beach to watch them coming back to their nesting grounds, the world's only known colony. There were a few hundreds, despite the heavy rain, and a pair of Variable Oystercatchers.

The Great spotted kiwi is present but nocturnal and secretive. Listen for a loud snuffling or a harsh whistling cry and you'll know one is close by! We walked along Bullock's Creek Road and the Inland track at night (8-10 :00 PM), where we heard four males and one female of Great Spotted Kiwi. The first one was apparently very close to the road, even if we did not see it. The male and female were responding to each other at the very end of the road.

Night in Punakaiki backpackers.

## **September 16. Punakaiki – Akaroa (NZ).**

We woke up pretty early and visited the various curiosities around Punakaiki : the pancake rocks, blowholes, as explained above (see September 3) and the Punakaiki cavern, located 5 min. from the DOC Visitor Center. A torch is necessary for a complete exploration.

Usual West Coast birds were also seen later on.

We crossed the Southern Alps via Arthur's Pass, and went up on the Otira Valley track again, in search of the Blue Duck and Rock Wren. Highly scenic walk, but – again – no luck with these two species.

Two Keas were feeding at the Deaths Corner lookout, which seems definitely the best place to see the species. Still very inquisitive...

We finished the day in Akaroa, by visiting Flea Bay. The South Island's first Marine Reserve is situated on the south eastern edge of Bank Peninsula, part of the Banks Peninsula Track.

Down there, Francis and Shireen Helps voluntarily care for the Penguin Colony under the guidance of Dr Chris Challies and the Department of Conservation. The Korara Penguin Reserve is closed to public access because of the sensitive nature of the habitat. Penguin viewing is controlled and it is only possible to see the birds when they return home in the evening. The penguin colony tours also include the chance to see remnants of a Red Beech forest which survived the podocarp invasion after the ice age and includes a visit to the ancient Maori Pa site. The sheep and cattle farm was established in 1843. Walk along the cliffs in the evening to watch the penguins meet in their social groups, swim to the shore like torpedos and preen their feathers before starting the long climb to their nests. The sun setting across the harbour and the folds of the peninsula hills from the volcanic rim is a bonus.

Francis welcomed us there around 6 :00 PM and we went to 'his' cliffs to see the White-flipped Blue Penguin (*Eudyptula minor albosignata*). About 500 pairs are nesting here, both in naturel burrows and in numerous nestboxes. We got very close views on two pairs sitting on their nest, and saw a group of 9 birds come ashore at dawn. Calls were heard here and there in the bay.

The white-flipped penguin is a sub-species of the blue penguin and is restricted to the Banks Peninsula, Motunau Island and the North Canterbury coast. They are very similar to the Blue Penguin, differing only in slightly larger size, lighter plumage and having large areas of white plumage on the dorsal surface of the wings. Francis and Shireen Helps were recently awarded a Banks Peninsula Community Service Award in the Environmental Category to recognise the pair's work with white-flipped and yellow-eyed penguins at their Flea Bay farm. With predator trapping and nesting area enhancement the Flea Bay penguin colony now probably has more white-flipped penguins than anywhere else.

Last night in the car.

### **September 17. Akaroa - Christchurch (NZ).**

Early drive to Christchurch airport to catch the flight back to Brussels. Some interesting species along the Lake Ellesmere, with Grey Teals, Black Swans, Pukekos, and Australasian Harriers.

The usual introduced passerines were still present in the plain.



"Generally speaking, in New Zealand, it is only on the outskirts of the woods that we meet with insessorial birds in any number. As we penetrate into the heart of the forest, the birds become fewer, till at length they almost entirely disappear. But there is one species, whose range seems to be quite without restraint: common enough in the open coppice, it is to be found also in the gloomiest and most secluded parts of the forest.

I have been assured by officers who accompanied the celebrated Taranaki Expedition under Major-General Sir Trevor Chute, in 1866, that during that long anmarch the Robin was the only bird that gave any sign of life to those interminable and gloomy forests through which the army passed. The lively twitter and song of smaller birds had ended with the first day's march, the harsh cry of the Kaka, which had attended them far into the bush, had gradually ceased to be heard, and the wood pigeon, whose range extends to the summits of the low wooded ridges of the interior, was no longer to be met with. An oppressive silence reigned around them, broken only by the shrill chirp of the startled Robin as the advance guard cut a path for the troops through hitherto untrodden woods. Indeed the presence of this little bird was the only exception to the utter absence of animal life, and almost the only relief to the monotony of the march. Perched on a

low branch, it might frequently be seen looking gravely down, as if in silent wonderment, on the weary ranks, as they toiled their way through this virgin forest in the very heart of the enemy's country.

As the popular name implies, it is naturally as tame bird; and in little frequented parts of the country it is so fearless and unsuspecting of man that it will approach to within a yard of the traveller, and sometimes even perch on his head or shoulder. It is the favourite companion of the lonesome woodcutter, enlivening him with its cheerful notes; and when, sitting on a log, he partakes of his humble meal, it hops at his feet, like the traditional Robin, to pick up the crumbs.

Like its namesake in the old country, moreover, it is noisy, active, and cheerful. Its note is generally the first to herald the dawn, while it is the last to be hushed when evening shades bring gloom to the forest. But there is a noticeable difference between the morning and the evening performance; the former consists of notes commencing very high and running down to a low key, uttered in quick succession, and with all the energy of a challenge to the rest of the feathered tribe. The evening performance is merely a short chirping note, quickly repeated, and with a rather melancholy sound. Three or four of them will sometimes join in a chirping chorus, and continue it till the shades of advancing twilight have deepened into night.

It generally breeds in the months of October and November. It constructs a large and compact nest, composed externally of coarse moss firmly interwoven and thickly lined inside with the soft hair like substance which covers the young stems of the tree-fern. It is usually built against the bole of a tree, at a moderate elevation from the ground, being often found attached to and supported by the wiry stems of the kiekie.

Should the nest happen to be molested after the young are hatched, the parent birds manifest the utmost solicitude, hopping about near the intruder with outspread and quivering wings, uttering a low piping note, and showing every symptom of real distress."

Text from Buller's History of the Birds of New Zealand, 1888.

### **Guided Tours**

- **Dolphin Watch Marlborough** : Les and Zoe Battersby, Next to the Picton Visitor Information Center. Phone : +64 (0)3 573 8040 – Fax : + 64 (0)3 573 7906 - PO Box 197 – PICTON.  
Les and Zoe propose a cruise to the roosting site of the rare King Shag, found only in the Marlborough Sounds. You will also land on the Motuara island Bird Sanctuary for a walk through the bush. One of the rare spot for the South Island Saddleback, and for nesting Blue Penguins, in a predator-free environment. Departs daily 8 :45 AM and 1 :45 PM.
- **The Royal Albatross Center** : Dunedin, Otago Peninsula, NZ. Phone : +64 (0)3 478 0499 - Fax: +64 (0)3 478 0575 – [reservations@albatrosses.com](mailto:reservations@albatrosses.com)  
Taiaroa Head on the Otago Peninsula is unique, having the only mainland colony of Albatross in the world.
- **The Penguin Place** : Yellow-eyed Penguin Conservation Reserve, PO Box 963, Dunedin, NZ.  
Phone: +64 (0)3 478 0286 - Fax: +64 (0)3 478 0257 – <http://www.penguin-place.co.nz>  
Offers you the opportunity to see this endangered penguin at close range through a unique system of hides and tunnels. Experience and photograph undisturbed activities of the birds.

## Accommodations.

- **Heron Island Resort.** High-quality Hotel, with wonderful rooms and food. More than expensive, with a fare of ... AU\$/night for a twin room (all-inclusive).
- **The George Hotel.** Same comments. 285 NZ\$/night for a twin room.
- **Nights in the car.** Cheap, and tolerable even in Arthur's Pass, despite the heavy snow and temp descending below 0°C...
- **Croydon House.** Nita and Siegfried Herbst. 63 Armagh Street, Christchurch. Phone : 0800276936 – email : [welcome@croydon.co.nz](mailto:welcome@croydon.co.nz) – Web : [www.croydon.co.nz](http://www.croydon.co.nz). Cosy B&B. Warm welcome, but 95 NZ\$/night for a twin room.
- **Property Arcade.** 12 NZ\$. A bit dirty, but a good start to get interesting hints (and fares) for the trip to Stewart Is.
- **Freds Camp Hut and Freshwater Hut.** Maintained by the Department of Conservation (DOC) of Halfmoon Bay. 10 NZ\$ / night.
- **Kowhai Cottage.** Margaret and Lindsay Faulkner. 8 Groveburn Rd. Tuatapere. Phone : (03) 2266650 – Cellphone 0256062363 – email : [marlinf@es.co.nz](mailto:marlinf@es.co.nz)
- **Milford Sound Lodge.** Milford Sound, Main Rd. 20 NZ\$ in the dormitory (4 beds).
- **Okuru Beach B&B.** Marian and Derek Beynon. PO Box 59, Haast. Phone : 037500719. Fax : 037500722. Email : [okurubeach@xtra.co.nz](mailto:okurubeach@xtra.co.nz) 65 NZ\$ / night in a double room.
- **Okarito Youth Hostel.** Main Rd. Recently refurbished. 10 NZ\$/night.
- **Punakaiki Backpackers.** 42 NZ\$/night in a twin room.

## Notes on the endemics

A mountainous land, equidistant between the equator and the Antarctic, in the middle of the southwestern Pacific surrounded by over 800 miles of ocean in every direction, New Zealand is home to a wonderful array of life and landscape. For its size, it is perhaps the most diverse land on the planet and its birds are equally fascinating and different – tropical-like parrots and albatross live within a few miles of each other. Birds of all stages of flight and flightlessness occur, and hibernating endemic wrens and rare penguins can be viewed in the same valley.

Like most islands, New Zealand's islands are not over-endowed with species. What makes New Zealand stand out is the quality of the endemics, the superb viewing possible of so many of them and, without doubt, the seabirding. Where else can one watch 14 different pelagic species all within just a few yards of the vessel, and that vessel being only 20 minutes from shore!

Almost half the New Zealand species are seabirds, and for anyone interested in seeing the widest possible array on a series of short, often even gentle pelagic trips, then New Zealand is a must. Over a few days around the country's more southern shores you can reasonably expect to see five to seven species of albatross (more with the new splitting of the Wandering Albatross), three penguin species including two endemics, and a wide variety of shearwaters and petrels, with many of these also being endemic to these southern ocean islands.

Equally attractive is that often on the same day that you have been viewing pelagics, you can enjoy rare endemic land birds such as the ubiquitous Kiwi, Saddleback, and even the so-called semi-flighted avian squirrel, the Kokako.

Tragically, introduced predatory mammals are wreaking havoc with both species numbers, and numbers of each species. Many species have already vanished, and today many more are on the brink, clinging precariously to survival in just a few localities, with great conservation work being undertaken. Yet, even with the best efforts, some continue to decline, and birds such as the canary-like Mohua or Yellowhead, the Blue Duck, and the representatives of the three endemic families, are severely threatened, their future far from secure. Please pay particular attention to the plight and conservation effort of such species!



New Zealand is but the size of the typical U.S. state, being about 1,000,000 square miles. But unlike any U.S. state, it has the diversity of landscape usually only found in a continent. Never more than 65 miles from the ocean, one finds semi-desert, lush podocarp (coniferous) rainforest, cool montane evergreen beech forest, tall tussocklands, and high alpine environments – all virtually within spitting distance of each other.

Consequently the birding, while not rich in species numbers, is fascinating with a high degree of endemism, flightlessness, and antiquity characterizing the avifauna. We located 33 of the possible New Zealand endemics during this trip Pacific, while at the same time enjoying scenic grandeur as can only be seen in this country.

Despite the information we had, we missed some species: The Blue Duck, Rock Wren, Yellowheads and New Zealand Falcon...

### **Internet references**

*Pulau Ubin*: [http://www.nparks.gov.sg/nature/f\\_ubin.htm](http://www.nparks.gov.sg/nature/f_ubin.htm)

*Heron Island Nature Reserve* : <http://www.great-barrier-reef.com/heron/>

#### ***Heron Island Resort* :**

P & O Australian Resorts, 245-M Mount Herman Road, #B Scotts Valley, CA 95066. Ph: (800) 225-9849. Fax: (831) 335-5239 Email: [poresorts@aol.com](mailto:poresorts@aol.com)  
Web site: <http://www.poresorts.com.au>

*OceanWings -Kaikoura* : <http://www.oceanwings.co.nz/index.htm>

*Stewart Island* : <http://www.stewartisland.co.nz/>

with a bird list at [http://www.stewartisland.co.nz/Attractions/Birds\\_fm.htm](http://www.stewartisland.co.nz/Attractions/Birds_fm.htm)

*Foveaux Express* : <http://www.foveauxexpress.co.nz/>

### **Acknowledgements**

First, my warm thanks go to Victor Yue, who kindly welcomed me at my gate when I arrived in Singapore at the international airport. He drove me to the best birding places I could get during my short (12 hours) stay in town. He not only showed me many many bird species, but also organized a funny lunch and summarized our trip on his world-famous Birds-pix mailing list.

I also would like to sincerely thank Nick Allen, Canterbury representative of the New Zealand Ornithological Society, for his welcome and advices. We spent a wonderful birding day around the Lake Ellesmere and he kindly showed me the only Wrybills I saw during the trip. Nick also provided me with detailed maps and trip reports very useful during the rest of my trip.

Second, my gratitude goes to all these people who posted trip report over the internet, with special thanks to Helen Baines, Ross Silcock and Urs Geiser.

Wendy Shingler joined our group on September 7 and spent a few days with us on Stewart Island. We will always keep excellent souvenirs of our long walk in the bush. She also took great care of our backpacks when we explored the bush to get ready for kiwi-spotting.

Francis Helps warmly welcomed us in his house on September 16 and during a memorable walk, allowed us to have close views on the rare White-flipped Penguin.

Last but not least, I'm really indebted to my non-birding pal, Benoit Ginion, who followed me here and there on the tracks, with an impressive dose of patience, humor, and even enthusiasm. His friendship largely contributed to the success of this trip.

### **Cover picture**

The Kiwi plate, reproduced from the Handbook of the Birds of the World, Vol 1. P. 109.  
The other photographs, birds and landscapes, were taken by Stéphane Moniotte. Other pictures are available on request.