

**TROPICAL
BIRDING**



New Zealand

**29th November -
10th December 2018**



Kiwis, like this Stewart Island Kiwi, are unique, strange, and always a top target for any visiting birder

Tour Leader: Lisle Gwynn

All photos in this report were taken by Lisle Gwynn on this tour
Species depicted in photographs are named in **BOLD RED**

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Introduction

New Zealand, or Aotearoa as the Maori call it, consists of two islands. The North Island is lush and green, sub-tropical and humid. The South Island, is not; it is a land of scree slopes and frigid snowy Alpine peaks, dank fern forests and storm-beaten Southern Ocean coasts. Both transport you to another world, in another time. Everything about this land is ancient and unique, featuring 3 endemic bird families, nearly 80 endemic bird species and a whole host of endemic-breeding seabirds. Of course many of these species are found on the subantarctic and subtropical islands surrounding the two main islands. This tour was arranged to compliment an expedition cruise that visited most of those islands and so served as a custom clean-up attempt to add as many extra endemics as possible.

Compared to a standard tour we focussed less on seabirds, as Sonia had seen them all in the weeks previous, and more on the mainland endemics which she was yet to see. We skipped pelagics at Kaikoura, as it would have added more time for no extra birds, but focussed more time as back-up in case we missed anything on our run-around. Attempting nearly every endemic in 12 days is quite some task and involved a lot of intense field days, little to no down time, late nights looking for kiwi, a lot of travel in the duller midday hours, and a whole load of fun. The general itinerary began with a visit to Stewart Island, then returned to the South Island visiting Te Anau, Milford Sound and the legendary Mount Cook, before crossing the mountains to the west coast and Okarito, then dashing back across the Southern Alps to Christchurch to fly to Auckland. On the North Island we visited the unbeatable Tiritiri Matangi sanctuary, a mainland Australasian Gannet colony at Muriwai and then travelled north via some important birds to Kerikeri for our fourth and final kiwi. We then travelled south again to Miranda Shorebird Reserve and finally visited Turangi to try for the bizarre Blue Duck. We birded hard and fast until the very last minute, racking up an impressive list and even more impressive given the relatively short duration of the tour. Nothing eluded us; quite remarkable.

New Zealand is one of my favourite countries to bird in. What it lacks in numbers, compared to the tropics, it more than makes up for in uniqueness and endemism. Almost everything you look at is endemic, and it's an amazing feeling to experience. Add to that a whole host of exciting seabirds, several endemic bird families, some bloody good looking birds, THREE penguins and FOUR kiwis, as well as obscenely wonderful scenery, and you have the core ingredients for a truly epic birding adventure.

DAY 1: DUNEDIN TO STEWART ISLAND

With Sonia's ship arriving early this morning we met in the Scots-tinged town of Dunedin on the east coast of New Zealand's rugged and beautiful South Island. Today was primarily a travel day and we had a date with a ferry in the late afternoon to take us to Stewart Island so after the first of many necessary coffee stops we were on our way blazing a trail through the agricultural coastal belt. **Purple Swamphen** (Pukeko) brightened the journey, as did **Welcome Swallow**, **Red-billed** and **Kelp Gulls**, and our first couple of fly-through **Tui**. These were punctuated by many introduced species including **Yellowhammer**, **House Sparrow**, **Eurasian Blackbird**, **Song Thrush** and **Eurasian Skylark**, often in numbers that we simply don't see in their European homelands anymore. So, despite being introduced, it's a guilty delight to see these birds.

After a couple of beautiful pies for lunch from one of New Zealand's best pie shops in Invercargill, including an excellent NZ Lamb and Kumara, we made our way down to the little port town of Bluff, and the setting out point for our Stewart Island crossing. Before we had even boarded the boat we had **Spotted Shag** and **Foveaux Shag** under the belt, as well as some nice views of a **Tui** feeding on a beautiful red flower. But it was once onboard that the birds truly began. Despite a fairly quiet, and bumpy, crossing, we managed to pick up both **White-capped** and **Salvin's Albatross**, a gigantic **Southern Royal Albatross**, lots of **Common Diving Petrels**, a few **Little Penguins**, **Cook's Petrel**, and our target: **Subantarctic (South Georgian) Diving Petrel**. These fairly distinctive birds are likely not 'South Georgian' as they are currently designated but more likely a species (or two) in their own right - hence the name 'Subantarctic' Diving Petrel. It was tough at times to even get the binoculars up to get on the birds but a particularly close, and particularly distinctive individual, gave us a good solid experience with this species.

It was salty smiles all round as we took a pre-dinner stroll to find **Kaka** and **New Zealand Pigeon**, as well as some distant barely-tickable **Fiordland Crested Penguins**.



DAY 2: ULVA & STEWART ISLANDS

Island sanctuaries are a key fixture of birding in New Zealand. The sad truth is that most of the native birds have fallen foul of introduced predators and massive habitat loss, and now exist only on these predator-free and intensely monitored islands. It is easy to realise why these birds had such a hard time with the predators when you arrive on Ulva Island, after a short 10 minute water taxi ride, and are instantly greeted by a couple of **Yellow-crowned Parakeet** flying through, and several **South Island Robins** that want nothing more than to intimately inspect you and your belongings. Or perhaps the flock of **Yellowheads** and **Brown Creepers** that surrounded us at arm's-length soon after. Or maybe the best example was the pair of **Kaka** that fed oblivious to our presence, or entirely unconcerned, just a couple of metres away on the ground. Or, just maybe, a few minutes down the path it was the group of **Weka** intent on raiding our picnic lunch that were the best example of vulnerable endemics. The **South Island Saddlebacks**, **Grey Gerygones** and **New Zealand Fantails** had a little more dignity and kept their distance, singing from a comparatively colossal 5 metres away, but I am not joking when I say that Rifleman gave us the run around. We searched and searched for this diminutive little stub-tailed endemic without luck. It would have to wait for another day, we hoped. Perhaps highlight of the day though came in the form of a roosting **Morepork**, the endemic owl, that peered at us bleary-eyed just a few feet off of the path. An utterly phenomenal introduction to New Zealand endemism.

Having walked our chosen path a couple of times, had a delightful sun-drenched picnic lunch on an idyllic beach surrounded by **Weka** and found all of our targets, we took a late-afternoon break for a couple of hours before having an early dinner and taking a stroll along the shore. More **Kaka** and **New Zealand Pigeon** were pleasant, and plenty of distant **Little Penguins** kept us entertained, but it was all nerves and anticipation for our true evening activity...

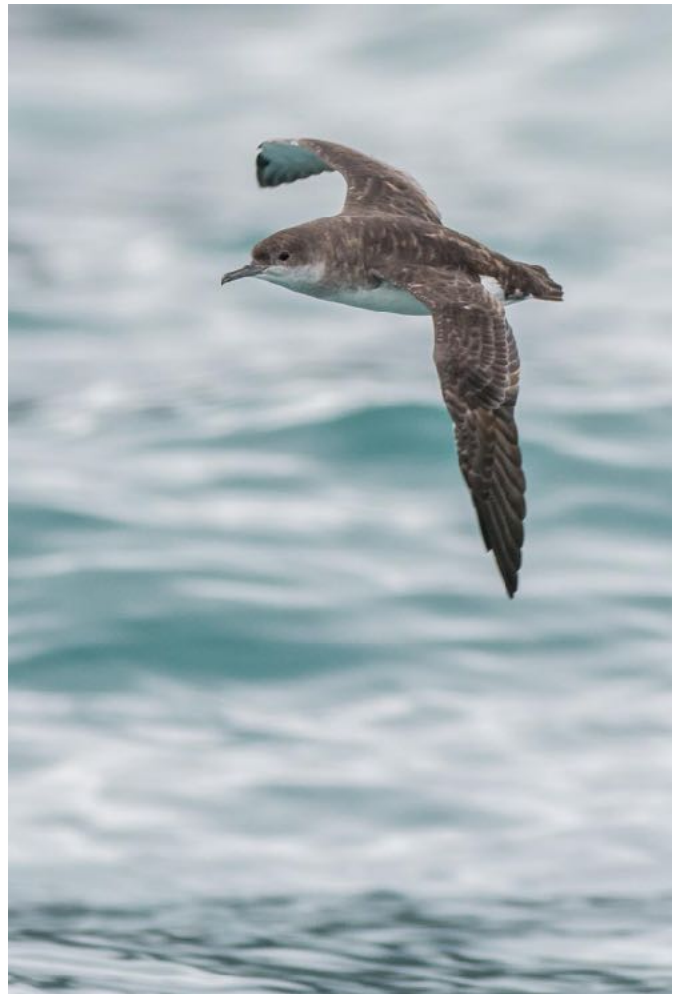


At around 10pm, after darkness had enveloped the island, we made our way out with a colourful local guide to a nearby private predator-free sanctuary. We arrived to the sound of... nothing. It was silent. In the distance a **Cook's Petrel** soon piped up, and then a couple of **Morepork** duetted, and then silence once again. This was to be the theme of our hunt for kiwis for an hour or so. By the time we had reached the furthest point of our walk I was starting to suffer from guide's anxiety as we hadn't had a peep from the normally vocal local kiwi species. Then, as if by magic, a loud churrrr and squeal came from a nearby bush - KIWI! I frantically helped Sonia identify the furry arse in the bush as that of a kiwi, but it was hardly satisfying. I must stress that *any* view of a kiwi is a *good* view of a kiwi. But luckily the birding Gods were on our side this evening and soon a dark lumbering shape loomed into view on the path - a **Stewart Island Kiwi** was lurching towards us! And lurch it did until it came to a halting stop, because it could go no further, because it was stood an inch from our feet. It gave us a sniff, and snuffled off back into the undergrowth. Stinging high fives and hugs were had, and we made our way back to Oban, the town in which we were sleeping. I must mention though, that this journey took us significantly longer than anticipated as we had *repeated* close encounters with no less than TEN individual kiwis! TEN. Yes, TEN!!! Double figures for individual kiwis. Pinch me, please...

DAY 3: STEWART ISLAND TO TE ANAU

“Good morning, did you sleep well?”; perhaps ‘did you sleep at all?’ would have been a more apt question to open the day with. How could either of us sleep after such adrenaline pumping kiwi action? The answer is: we couldn't. Sonia had found her desired kiwi experience, and Lisle had discovered a previously unknown love for furry girls with big feet and huge bums - I'm talking about the kiwis - so neither of us slept more than a couple of winks. But there was no time for rest, more birds and quite a journey was laid out before us. A 5 minute walk took us once more to the ferry, and an hour's sail over glassy calm water saw us arriving into Bluff having tallied dozens of **Common Diving Petrels**, lots of **Sooty Shearwater**, a couple of **Fluttering Shearwater** and even a **Yellow-eyed Penguin** was seen. Not a bad crossing for such a calm morning.

The summer days here are surprisingly warm for such a southerly point, and the birds seem to like it. The action doesn't really begin until 8 or 9am - a time when things would be wrapping up for the day in the tropics. The days are also long, with sunrise around 6am and sunset around 9:30pm, so there is plenty of time for driving and birding, definitely required on such a hectic and focussed itinerary. Today's relatively 'restrained' drive of just a few hours took us away from the coast and to the beautiful lake-side town of Te Anau, after a stop for some close and *stunning* **Black-fronted Terns**, surely among the world's best terns.





Okay, so the town itself isn't beautiful, but the setting is stereotypically stunning South Island - frosty, snow-capped mountains, glacial lakes and deep green forest - the kind of scenery that stirs the soul of a temperate climate dweller. Once again, we had birds to hunt for... a further dash toward Milford Sound found as at the fabled Homer Tunnel where I'd be given a rather rough map and some info for our target bird. Unfortunately, the Rock Wrens hadn't been informed of our desire to visit, and remained a firm no show, though they did give us a brief little shout from atop a distant rock out of view. All was not lost though, as we enjoyed the other key resident of these here hills - the enigmatic, charismatic and scoundrel-calibre denizens of the valley - the notorious

Kea. A truly beautiful bird, the world's only truly alpine parrot decided that our SUV was worthy of a poke around. And a nibble. And a... "oh God it's biting the brake lines!" I shouted back toward the car park. Even my looming presence couldn't deter them, as they stood on the roof and peered through the window of the raised back door, giving us a "whatcha got in there then?" kind of gaze, heads tilted and eyes bright. A solid Chinese meal finished the day.



DAY 4: TE ANAU TO MOUNT COOK

Our luck with these endemic New Zealand stubtails wasn't seeming to be in, but we just weren't having it. I'd planned for this eventuality, as Rock Wren *can* be tricky, so we made our way back to the idyllic setting of Homer Tunnel early today. It took all of 30 minutes to find 2 different **Rock Wrens**, settling my mind that we were in fact not some sort of stubtail repellent. Excellent views were had, which is typical of many of New Zealand's tame and approachable birds, and we simply had to choose to walk away once we'd had our fill - always a nice scenario to find yourself in on a birding trip!

We spent the warmer daytime hours slowly making our way from Te Anau into the looming presence of Mount Cook. We made stops along the way for leg stretches, bathroom breaks, and superb food at a restaurant run by a chef friend of mine. Ed really delivered and an excellent vegan salad for Sonia, complete with chocolate and fig balls compliments of the chef, and we were on our way again bellies full and happier for having seen the 'normal tourist' Mecca of Queenstown.



A few more hours down the road and we were pulling up next to a braided river delta running into an ice-blue lake, looked over by snow and glacier-capped Mount Cook itself. It didn't take us long to find our targets, but we spent quite a lot of time sat enjoying a couple of incredibly endangered **Black Stilt**, a handful of breeding-plumaged **Wrybill**, a pair of stunning **Double-banded Dotterel**, and some regularly patrolling **Black-fronted Tern** - has a more bizarre, rare and beautiful combination of lifers ever presented themselves together before? Perhaps. But we enjoyed our low-sun, soft-light session with these iconic New Zealand mega aves.



DAY 5: MOUNT COOK TO OKARITO

We couldn't resist another early morning visit to the delta today, and we were rewarded with more close views of **Black Stilt**, **Wrybill**, **Double-banded Dotterel** and **Black-fronted Tern**, but we had quite a journey to make if we wanted our second kiwi of the tour...

It took most of the day to make it to our destination on the west coast of the South Island - the small hamlet of Okarito - but we broke things up with a stop in a valley forest finding **Tomtits** and a long break at Monroe Beach, home of one of the most accessible colonies of a special endemic. A beautiful if lengthy walk through thickly-ferned, humid and dank forest brought us to a sandy beach with typically-crashing Southern Ocean swell. There, at the end of the beach, was our target. Almost immediately we had great views of a large group of around 10 **Fiordland Crested Penguins** frolicking on the beach and rolling in the swell, much better than the distant views we'd had on Stewart Island.



Meeting up with one of New Zealand birding's biggest characters, Ian from Okarito Kiwi Tours, we made our way into the forest surrounding Okarito late this evening after a quick nap in anticipation of a long night. Indeed, long it was, but eventful and fruitful. To cut a long, and silent, story short, we waited amid a cloud of mosquitoes and moved with military precision along tracks in the forest until a close 'suirrrrrrrrrrrrrp' told us our target was close - a kiwi had just loudly defecated very nearby and the bizarrely cinnamon-esque scent filled our nostrils. With a little more patience, and resisting the urge to scream "ARGH IT'S A KIWI!" when it finally broke cover, we were treated to another unprecedentedly incredible encounter with one of the world's weirdest avian delights. An **Okarito Kiwi**, slightly smaller than the previous species with a white beard, had walked up to Sonia and I, sniffed our feet, and scuttled off around us. SUCCESS. Kiwi 2 was in the bag. Could we really go for all four of our target kiwis? We were beginning to get nervously optimistic...

DAY 6: OKARITO TO AUCKLAND

We were woken by rain this morning. Heavy rain. West Coast rain, as the kiwis call it. So we took the opportunity to have a hearty and well-deserved breakfast in a trendy little local cafe, close to the Indian restaurant we'd gorged ourselves in the night previous. Unfortunately the rain stuck with us the entire morning; fortunately, we'd cleaned up and had no real targets for the day other than an enjoyable day's birding and travelling. Phew! We made a stop in Arthur's Pass town at the top of the Southern Alps to grab a coffee and provoke some boisterous **Kea**, but we soon found warm delight in the sunshine of Christchurch. We had a flight to catch, but with a little time to kill I took Sonia to one of my favourite family-owned businesses, based in Christchurch and specialising in canvas-based clothing that can withstand almost anything you throw at it. Some new clothing in hand, handmade with love, we grabbed our flight to Auckland and checked into our motel for the night, buzzed with anticipation of new birds tomorrow...

DAY 7: TIRITIRI MATANGI

Waking early, we made a quick dash across Auckland, picked up a bakery breakfast en route, and arrived with plenty of time before the short ferry ride from Gulf Harbour across to Tiritiri Matangi island. The journey across was relatively birdless, with flat conditions, but things changed once we arrived on the island itself.

A sanctuary, similar to Ulva Island in the south, Tiritiri Matangi is one of a handful of places in New Zealand, and indeed the world, where some of the country's rarest endemics persist in relative safety. Some of these don't even occur on the mainland anymore, others are inaccessible or sensitive to disturbance, so this island gives the only realistic chance of seeing them. The island is accessible on a day visit, and like Ulva most of the target species can be seen in a relatively short period of time, but some take a little more searching. **North Island Kokako** is one of these birds; they're scarce even here, relatively unobtrusive, and their sombre calls carry far and wide, making them often tricky to track down. There are also just 3 remaining on the island, after the others were taken for reintroduction projects elsewhere. We found them, along the Wattle Track, a beautiful step back in time to the world of yestermillenia, but they didn't give up their best pose, despite encountering them briefly a handful of times. They would remain one of the only birds we saw with less-than-stunning views. Another bird that can be difficult, is the **Takahē**. This giant purple, green and blue flightless rallid with a giant red saw-toothed bill is incredibly rare, obscenely endangered, ultimately iconic, and very very shy. The hordes of day visitors force them to retreat to the thicker vegetation, so we took a beautifully calm evening walk to find them once the visitors had left - and find them we did. We had a wonderfully intimate encounter with three adults, and three chicks, and had them all to ourselves. Other slightly more obliging birds here included **North Island Saddleback, Red-crowned Parakeet, Brown Teal, New Zealand Bellbird, New Zealand Fantail, Whitehead** a chance encounter with a **Shining Bronze Cuckoo**, seemingly endless numbers of **Tui**, and one of our favourites - the incredible Hihi, or **Stitchbird**, replete with white ear tufts, violently yellow plumage and contrasting black, making for one stunner of a rare nectivorous endemic.



New Zealand Bellbird are subtly beautiful



Tui are positively flamboyant



North Island Saddleback singing its heart out, complete with red gape wattles



Takahē are prehistoric looking beasts



Of course, the main reason for staying overnight on the island, aside from just to enjoy the absolute quiet, perfect night sky and distant views of shimmering Auckland, was to search for our third kiwi. Extinct on the mainland, Little Spotted Kiwi is a tiny grey-blue example of this endemic and weird bird family. Of course Sonia the kiwi whisperer wasted no time in blazing this one onto her list of awesome encounters as we turned a corner onto what I call the firebreak track and almost immediately had one of these little oddities trundle into the open, freeze, and then hop over a little ridge before snuffling off into the undergrowth. **Little Spotted Kiwi**, our third, and excellent views to boot. "Shall we carry on, maybe get more views?"; I needn't have asked. We continued to stroll in the dark for another few hours, enjoying the night sky, being serenaded by Little Spotted Kiwis and Morepork, and enjoying the other-worldly gargling of **Cook's Petrels** and **Grey-faced Petrels**. It is absolutely safe to say, we went to bed very very happy this evening.

DAY 8: TIRITIRI MATANGI

Up bright and early (when are we not?), we strode on out into the morning sunshine. It had rained overnight and there were **Purple Swamphen** feeding on the grassy lawn outside the house, so we went and had a quiet breakfast alone on a hilltop bench. We hadn't much to look for, other than more enjoyment in some of the most pleasant and endemic-rich birding in the southern Pacific. We spent until mid-afternoon trundling around, seeing much the same as yesterday - that is to say, a lot of good birds! Until it was time to once again pack our things and move on. Of course, not content with her torch-light views, Sonia just had to go and find a **Little Spotted Kiwi** in BROAD DAYLIGHT. Unprecedented and utterly, utterly incredible. The ferry ride back to the mainland found us lots of good looks at **Fluttering Shearwater**, as well as a few **Arctic Skua (Parasitic Jaeger)** and **Australian Gannet**. We'd earned a night off, so we took it with delight and celebrated our third kiwi with another hearty curry. Two Brits, with three kiwis, and a cracking curry.

DAY 9: GULF HARBOUR TO KERIKERI

Our time on the North Island had only really begun in earnest, so we had a few target birds for the day. We had already seen **Australasian Gannet** but with an accessible and impressive mainland colony more or less on the way to our next base, we just had to have a look. A quick stop in at Muriwai netted us a good cooked breakfast, and excellent arms-length views of the gannets as well as **Caspian** and **White-fronted Terns**. After a little drive, and a stop in at a decidedly hillbilly gas station, we arrived at our next stop: Waipu. This pretty little series of sand dunes and estuaries is home to one of New Zealand's most threatened birds, the New Zealand Fairy Tern. Less than 40 pairs breed each year, making its existence very precarious indeed. This became all too obvious by the amount of searching we had to do. Luckily we had plenty of amazing, close, perfect-plumaged **New Zealand Dotterels** to keep us busy, as well as a **Pacific Reef Heron**, and about 20 **White-faced Herons** but the tern just couldn't be found. After a break for lunch, a return to our original spot, and then relocating to a back-up site I *finally* found us a distant view of **New Zealand Fairy Tern**. I'm not a big proponent of poor views, so though the views were perfectly tickable, I vowed to get us better the following day.



We arrived in the small but bustling town of Kerikeri in time to check in to our beautiful accommodation and get a fantastic Thai meal for dinner. The abundance of Asian food in this country is always a delight, especially with a vegetarian on board. Soon darkness was falling, and we had a bit of a drive to undertake before we got into good habitat for our target: our fourth and final kiwi. Could we score all four? Surely not... It didn't take long before we heard our first North Island Brown Kiwi. Then another. And another. *And another.* They were calling from everywhere around us! I've never been to a place with a seemingly higher density of kiwis than this spot. Our local guide had done us proud. It was now just down to us to get views. I'd love to spin a tale of strife and hardship, epic hikes and adventure, but the fact is that Sonia the kiwi whisperer had done it again - before long we'd had stonking views of a whopping great female **North Island Brown Kiwi!** Success! Ultimate, ultimate success! We walked further still, and by the end of our evening's stroll we'd seen five different North Island Brown Kiwi, including one right at the end by our car that hopped and stomped and trundled across the field giving absolutely mind-blowing views. Not only had we found Sonia a kiwi, she'd been fully immersed in the most ultimate of New Zealand experiences - a flood of kiwis! 18 individuals, of four species. Unprecedented.

DAY 10: KERIKERI TO MIRANDA SHOREBIRD RESERVE

"Good morning, did you sleep well?" I stupidly asked again, knowing full well that Sonia had had as much sleep as I - very little! Our beds were comfy, our rooms warm, and our surroundings wild, but our experiences earlier in the night ensured we didn't rest a bit. This is the best kind of fatigue.

I had promised Sonia another go at Fairy Tern, and I wasn't about to welch on that promise. But first, we had other birds in mind. A quick stop at a small pond that at first seemed a little too... well... normal, to hold much worth looking at. But Sonia's endless faith in me as a guide to all things feathery and New Zealand saw her adding two more new endemic birds at what is little more than a fishing lake. We had absolutely astonishing close views of some really dapper **New Zealand Grebes**, followed by a fully relaxed **New Zealand Scaup (next page)** complete with chicks that cruised about and duck dived just a few feet away from us. Why did I even bother bringing the 'scope?





A short while later we were back in our spot of moderate success from yesterday - Waipu. I had a sneaking suspicion that Fairy Tern, or Riflebird, would become our nemesis. Fortunately for us after some time scanning the estuary and meandering amongst **New Zealand Dotterel**, a **New Zealand Fairy Tern** had the decency to come and land on a sandbar at a distance that afforded significantly better views than before. White forehead? Check. Weird wide bill? Check. Tiny tern? Check. Onwards we go...

An extended drive around the coast found us no further new birds, though aside from a subspecies tick of Weka I hadn't expected all too much in transit. Arriving at the base of the Thames estuary, travelling along at a fair speed, Sonia asked "so really, how easy are these Black-billed Gulls to ID from a distance?", and in a stroke of luck I could happily reply "Well, there's one, let's have a look". Rarely has a bird turned up with such impeccable timing but we were soon grilling the detail of the stunning **Black-billed Gull** with its beady pale eye and snowy white primaries.

Our evening was spent in shorebird (waders, to us Brits) heaven at the Miranda Shorebird Reserve. We took a stroll out to a couple of the hides (blinds) and sifted through thousands upon thousands *upon thousands* of birds to see what we could tease out. **Bar-tailed Godwit** made up the vast majority, having found their way here via a non-stop flight from Alaska. But amongst them, a couple hundred **Wrybill** really upped the ante, a handful of beautiful **Sharp-tailed Sandpipers** added a Siberian flare, and the USA stepped up with a single **Pectoral Sandpiper**, a rare vagrant to New Zealand. Ironically, statistically the 'best' bird of the afternoon was a **Broad-billed Sandpiper** (which turned out in fact to be two individuals), which though out-classed by Wrybill represented the first (and second) record of this species in New Zealand for 15 years. Attention soon turned to some **Royal Spoonbill**, as well as **White-faced Heron** and the setting sun. It was time for bed.



A flock of Wrybill take flight at Miranda Shorebird Reserve

DAY 11: THAMES TO TURANGI

We had decided last night that it was best to grab some breakfast from a bakery/café and head back to the estuary for an early morning session. I had a plan in mind, and it seemed to unfold without too much of a hitch. Sat in the car park, staring at the mangroves our coffee sipping was delightfully interrupted by a pair of the distinctive New Zealand race of **Buff-banded Rail** putting on a bit of a show right in front of us. Out on the estuary there was much the same as last night, with the light not quite as nice, so we concentrated on the lagoon before making a move in search of something new.



Another drive brought us through disappointingly monocultured agricultural lands to a discreet parking lot. Walking under an arch of vegetation we emerged among pristine, beautiful, fragrant forest to the sound of **Whitehead, Long-tailed Koel, Red-crowned Parakeet, Kaka** and **Rifleman**. Despite trying really quite hard, neither the koel nor the rifleman could be coaxed out from their hiding spots, very frustrating but time was moving on and it was time to shift once again.

A short drive brought us to the town of Turangi, on the shore of Lake Taupo, where we spent the majority of the afternoon scouring the river for our target here, the strange Blue Duck. Try as we may, we weren't having much luck and decided to try another spot for Rifleman... which had been felled since I last visited. Drat. Back to the river we go. Setting up camp on the bank of the river we scanned and scanned when, nigh on sunset, two stunning **Blue Duck** decided to appear from their hiding spot amongst the rocks and saunter down the river giving us fantastic 'scope views. Success! How to celebrate? Another curry of course...

DAY 12: TURANGI TO AUCKLAND & DEPARTURE

Our final day had dawned, and we still had one target left... I decided we were best off trying an old forest trail I'd had success at in the past, but I was getting anxious. We walked uphill for a couple of dozen metres before hearing the tell-tale high pitched 'seep seep seep seep' of Rifleman... it was all eyes on, and all stations manned. Sonia stood and scanned the canopy while I ran back and forth trying to predict where the birds would cross the path. Finally I got a glimpse and hoisted Sonia onto a fallen tree - "Don't hold onto me, I've got you, use your bins!" I commanded. She had them! A hug of success and relief knowing our final target had fallen. Amazingly the birds then came down to eye level and gave us stupendous views - **Rifleman**, a weird and wonderful New Zealand endemic, and our final of the tour. All that was left to do was to pop into a nearby wetland for a quick try for a nice little bonus beast. It took a little while to find one that was visible but Sonia managed to glimpse a single **Spotless Crane**, as they called all around us, and a couple of **Fernbird** even threw in some bonus views.

Arriving back into Auckland we had dinner before getting to the airport in time to pause and rest before checking in and beginning our journeys home. We'd had a truly whirlwind whip around New Zealand but scored every target we'd set out to, a quite remarkable feat. I'm not sure we'll beat 18 kiwi of 4 species any time soon...

Bird List following Clements (2018)

APTERYGIFORMES: Apterygidae

Southern Brown Kiwi	<i>Apteryx australis</i>	Endemic Vulnerable
Okarito Brown Kiwi	<i>Apteryx rowi</i>	Endemic Vulnerable
North Island Brown Kiwi	<i>Apteryx mantelli</i>	Endemic Vulnerable
Little Spotted Kiwi	<i>Apteryx owenii</i>	Endemic Near-threatened

ANSERIFORMES: Anatidae

Graylag Goose	<i>Anser anser</i>	Introduced species
Canada Goose	<i>Branta canadensis</i>	Introduced species
Cape Barren Goose	<i>Cereopsis novaehollandiae</i>	Rare/Accidental
Mute Swan	<i>Cygnus olor</i>	Introduced species
Black Swan	<i>Cygnus atratus</i>	Introduced species
Paradise Shelduck	<i>Tadorna variegata</i>	Endemic
Blue Duck	<i>Hymenolaimus malacorhynchos</i>	Endemic Endangered
Australian Shoveler	<i>Spatula rhynchotis</i>	
Pacific Black Duck	<i>Anas superciliosa</i>	
Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	Introduced species
Gray Teal	<i>Anas gracilis</i>	
Brown Teal	<i>Anas chlorotis</i>	Endemic Near-threatened
New Zealand Scaup	<i>Aythya novaeseelandiae</i>	Endemic

GALLIFORMES: Odontophoridae

California Quail	<i>Callipepla californica</i>	Introduced species
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GALLIFORMES: Phasianidae

Indian Peafowl	<i>Pavo cristatus</i>	Introduced species
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Brown Quail	<i>Synoicus ypsilophorus</i>	Introduced species
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Ring-necked Pheasant	<i>Phasianus colchicus</i>	Introduced species
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Wild Turkey	<i>Meleagris gallopavo</i>	Introduced species
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PODICIPEDIFORMES: Podicipedidae

New Zealand Grebe	<i>Poliiocephalus rufopectus</i>	Endemic Near-threatened
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COLUMBIFORMES: Columbidae

Rock Pigeon	<i>Columba livia</i>	Introduced species
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Spotted Dove	<i>Streptopelia chinensis</i>	Introduced species
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New Zealand Pigeon	<i>Hemiphaga novaeseelandiae</i>	Endemic
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CUCULIFORMES: Cuculidae

Long-tailed Koel	<i>Urodynamis taitensis</i>	Breeding endemic
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Shining Bronze-Cuckoo	<i>Chrysococcyx lucidus</i>	
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GRUIFORMES: Rallidae

Weka	<i>Gallirallus australis</i>	Endemic Vulnerable
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Buff-banded Rail	<i>Gallirallus philippensis</i>	
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Eurasian Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>	
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South Island Takahe	<i>Porphyrio hochstetteri</i>	Endemic Endangered
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Australasian Swamphen	<i>Porphyrio melanotus</i>	
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Spotless Crake	<i>Zapornia tabuensis</i>	
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CHARADRIIFORMES:**Recurvirostridae**

Pied Stilt	<i>Himantopus leucocephalus</i>	
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Black Stilt	<i>Himantopus novaezelandiae</i>	Endemic Critically endangered
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CHARADRIIFORMES:**Haematopodidae**

South Island Oystercatcher	<i>Haematopus finschi</i>	Endemic
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Variable Oystercatcher	<i>Haematopus unicolor</i>	Endemic
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CHARADRIIFORMES: Charadriidae

Pacific Golden-Plover	<i>Pluvialis fulva</i>	
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Masked Lapwing	<i>Vanellus miles</i>	
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Red-breasted Dotterel	<i>Charadrius obscurus</i>	Endemic
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Double-banded Plover	<i>Charadrius bicinctus</i>	
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Wrybill	<i>Anarhynchus frontalis</i>	Endemic Vulnerable
CHARADRIIFORMES: Scolopacidae		
Bar-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa lapponica</i>	Near-threatened
Ruddy Turnstone	<i>Arenaria interpres</i>	
Red Knot	<i>Calidris canutus</i>	Near-threatened
Sharp-tailed Sandpiper	<i>Calidris acuminata</i>	
Curlew Sandpiper	<i>Calidris ferruginea</i>	Near-threatened
Red-necked Stint	<i>Calidris ruficollis</i>	Near-threatened
CHARADRIIFORMES: Stercorariidae		
Parasitic Jaeger	<i>Stercorarius parasiticus</i>	
CHARADRIIFORMES: Laridae		
Black-billed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus bulleri</i>	Endemic Endangered
Red-billed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus scopulinus</i>	Endemic
Kelp Gull	<i>Larus dominicanus</i>	
Australian Fairy Tern	<i>Sternula nereis</i>	Vulnerable
Caspian Tern	<i>Hydroprogne caspia</i>	
Black-fronted Tern	<i>Chlidonias albobristatus</i>	Endemic Endangered
White-fronted Tern	<i>Sterna striata</i>	Breeding endemic
SPHENISCIFORMES: Spheniscidae		
Yellow-eyed Penguin	<i>Megadyptes antipodes</i>	Endemic Endangered
Little Penguin	<i>Eudyptula minor</i>	
Fiordland Penguin	<i>Eudyptes pachyrhynchus</i>	Breeding endemic Vulnerable
PROCELLARIIFORMES: Diomedeidae		
White-capped Albatross	<i>Thalassarche cauta</i>	
Southern Royal Albatross	<i>Diomedea epomophora</i>	
PROCELLARIIFORMES: Procellariidae		
Gray-faced Petrel	<i>Pterodroma gouldi</i>	Breeding endemic
Cook's Petrel	<i>Pterodroma cookii</i>	Breeding endemic Vulnerable
Sooty Shearwater	<i>Ardenna grisea</i>	Near-threatened
Fluttering Shearwater	<i>Puffinus gavia</i>	
Common Diving-Petrel	<i>Pelecanoides urinatrix</i>	
South Georgia Diving-Petrel	<i>Pelecanoides georgicus</i>	
SULIFORMES: Sulidae		
Australasian Gannet	<i>Morus serrator</i>	

SULIFORMES: Phalacrocoracidae

Little Pied Cormorant	<i>Microcarbo melanoleucos</i>	
Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>	
Spotted Shag	<i>Phalacrocorax punctatus</i>	Endemic
Little Black Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax sulcirostris</i>	
Pied Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax varius</i>	
Foveaux Shag	<i>Phalacrocorax chalconotus</i>	Endemic Vulnerable

PELECANIFORMES: Ardeidae

White-faced Heron	<i>Egretta novaehollandiae</i>	
Pacific Reef-Heron	<i>Egretta sacra</i>	

**PELECANIFORMES:
Threskiornithidae**

Royal Spoonbill	<i>Platalea regia</i>	
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ACCIPITRIFORMES: Accipitridae

Swamp Harrier	<i>Circus approximans</i>	
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STRIGIFORMES: Strigidae

Morepork	<i>Ninox novaeseelandiae</i>	
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CORACIIFORMES: Alcedinidae

Sacred Kingfisher	<i>Todiramphus sanctus</i>	
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FALCONIFORMES: Falconidae

New Zealand Falcon	<i>Falco novaeseelandiae</i>	Endemic Near-threatened
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PSITTACIFORMES: Strigopidae

Kea	<i>Nestor notabilis</i>	Endemic Endangered
New Zealand Kaka	<i>Nestor meridionalis</i>	Endemic Endangered

PSITTACIFORMES: Psittaculidae

Red-crowned Parakeet	<i>Cyanoramphus novaezelandiae</i>	
Yellow-crowned Parakeet	<i>Cyanoramphus auriceps</i>	Endemic Near-threatened
Eastern Rosella	<i>Platycercus eximius</i>	Introduced species

PASSERIFORMES: Acanthisittidae

Rifleman	<i>Acanthisitta chloris</i>	Endemic
South Island Wren	<i>Xenicus gilviventris</i>	Endemic Endangered

PASSERIFORMES: Meliphagidae

Tui	<i>Prothemadera novaeseelandiae</i>	Endemic
New Zealand Bellbird	<i>Anthornis melanura</i>	Endemic

PASSERIFORMES: Acanthizidae

Gray Gerygone	<i>Gerygone igata</i>	Endemic
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PASSERIFORMES: Mohouidae

Whitehead	<i>Mohoua albicilla</i>	Endemic
Yellowhead	<i>Mohoua ochrocephala</i>	Endemic Endangered
Pipipi	<i>Mohoua novaeseelandiae</i>	Endemic

PASSERIFORMES: Callaeidae

North Island Kokako	<i>Callaeas wilsoni</i>	Endemic Near-threatened
North Island Saddleback	<i>Philesturnus rufusater</i>	Endemic Near-threatened
South Island Saddleback	<i>Philesturnus carunculatus</i>	Endemic Near-threatened

PASSERIFORMES: Notiomystidae

Stitchbird	<i>Notiomystis cincta</i>	Endemic Vulnerable
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PASSERIFORMES: Cracticidae

Australian Magpie	<i>Gymnorhina tibicen</i>	Introduced species
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PASSERIFORMES: Rhipiduridae

New Zealand Fantail	<i>Rhipidura fuliginosa</i>	Endemic
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PASSERIFORMES: Petroicidae

Tomtit	<i>Petroica macrocephala</i>	Endemic
South Island Robin	<i>Petroica australis</i>	Endemic
North Island Robin		

PASSERIFORMES: Alaudidae

Eurasian Skylark	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>	Introduced species
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PASSERIFORMES: Hirundinidae

Welcome Swallow	<i>Hirundo neoxena</i>	
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PASSERIFORMES: Locustellidae

Fernbird	<i>Megalurus punctatus</i>	Endemic
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PASSERIFORMES: Zosteropidae

Silver-eye	<i>Zosterops lateralis</i>	
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PASSERIFORMES: Turdidae

Song Thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>	Introduced species
Eurasian Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	Introduced species

PASSERIFORMES: Sturnidae

European Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>	Introduced species
Common Myna	<i>Acridotheres tristis</i>	Introduced species

PASSERIFORMES: Prunellidae

Dunnoek	<i>Prunella modularis</i>	Introduced species
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PASSERIFORMES: Motacillidae

Australasian Pipit

Anthus novaeseelandiae

PASSERIFORMES: Fringillidae

Common Chaffinch

Fringilla coelebs

Introduced species

European Greenfinch

Chloris chloris

Introduced species

Common Redpoll

Acanthis flammea

Introduced species

Lesser Redpoll

Acanthis cabaret

Introduced species

European Goldfinch

Carduelis carduelis

Introduced species

PASSERIFORMES: Emberizidae

Yellowhammer

Emberiza citrinella

Introduced species

PASSERIFORMES: Passeridae

House Sparrow

Passer domesticus

Introduced species