



Field Guides Tour Report

NEW ZEALAND 2012

Oct 25, 2012 to Nov 14, 2012

Chris Benesh

For our tour description, itinerary, past triplists, dates, fees, and more, please [VISIT OUR TOUR PAGE](#).

Generally speaking, luck was on our side for this year's New Zealand tour. The weather here is typically changeable, and rain can often be a part of the equation. But aside from a few good rainstorms, we actually fared remarkably well with the weather. On top of that, we also fared pretty well with most of the specialty birds and wildlife. As islands go, the country of New Zealand is made up in large part by two of the largest (both in the top 15 based on area). Our tour afforded nearly three weeks to explore the riches of these two, along with smaller and more tranquil Stewart Island.

No one can argue that the New Zealand of today is in any way like that which existed prior to the arrival of the Maori, and later, the Europeans. It must have been quite a sight carpeted nearly completely with tall native forest, home to such notable beasts as the giant Haast Eagle, and some ten species of moas, an endemic order of birds, the Dinornithiformes. There were still Huias, Piopios, Laughing Owls, Bush Wrens and the like. Land clearing, habitation, and the introduction of numerous land predators has forever changed the landscape. Yet despite that, New Zealand remains a fascinating and unique place.

The land birds of New Zealand are some of the more fascinating ones around, and several of the families are found only here. Some are quite distinctive, and none more so than the bizarre kiwis. As our Okarito guide Ian pointed out, kiwis have in many ways adapted to living the lifestyle of a nocturnal mammal in the absence of true native land mammals. We were fortunate to see two members of this secretive family. There were other endemic families, too. We saw both Kea and Kaka, two members of the Strigopidae or New Zealand parrots, and we also saw the two extant members of the Acanthisittidae, the New Zealand Wrens. Genetics have shown them to be the most primitive members of the passerines. And then there were the distinctive members of the endemic Callaeidae family, the two saddlebacks and the Kokako, each with their distinctive wattles. In addition, the Stitchbird is now in its own endemic family, the Notiomystidae.

On top of having several endemic families of land birds, New Zealand truly shines in its pelagic environment. Owing in part to numerous small, offshore islands and rich, high biomass-laden waters, New Zealand provides some of the best seabird and marine mammal watching opportunities in the world. We took advantage of a few opportunities to get out and sample these. Our pre-trip pelagic in the Hauraki Gulf was amazing, encountering huge rafts of shearwaters at times, along with a great mix of special birds. And in Kaikoura, we ventured just a short ways offshore to experience a nice assortment of species, and also had great looks at Sperm Whale and Dusky Dolphins in the process. And Stewart Island provided another opportunity to take in the pelagic environment.

Beyond the birdlife, New Zealand must rank right up near the top of scenic places to travel in. At times, the scenery was simply breathtaking. And with a rich cultural history, well told by our two excellent driver/guides, we were well informed of most things kiwi.



The impressive Mt. Cook (Aoraki), the highest point in New Zealand. (Photo by guide Chris Benesh)

A special thanks to all of you for making this New Zealand trip such a pleasure to lead. It was great traveling around with you and I hope to do it again soon. I wish you all the best in birding.

-- Chris

KEYS FOR THIS LIST

One of the following keys may be shown in brackets for individual species as appropriate: * = heard only, I = introduced, E = endemic, N = nesting, a = austral migrant, b = boreal migrant

BIRDS

Apterygidae (Kiwis)

SOUTHERN BROWN KIWI (*Apteryx australis lawryi*) – We enjoyed great views of a couple of these after walking along a stretch of Ocean Beach on Stewart Island. This subspecies is endemic to Stewart Island. [E]

OKARITO BROWN KIWI (*Apteryx rowi*) – Well, no one will soon forget all of what went into this experience, but no one can question that we were extremely fortunate to have good views of this rare species as it walked across the footpath in front of us. Kudos to Ian for making it happen. [E]

Anatidae (Ducks, Geese, and Waterfowl)

CANADA GOOSE (*Branta canadensis*) [I]

CAPE BARREN GOOSE (*Cereopsis novaehollandiae*) – We saw a couple of these at St. Anne's Lagoon, near Cheviot. No one is certain how they arrived in New Zealand (from Australia), but they are established in small numbers. We drove past another bird on the west coast south of Greymouth. [I]

BLACK SWAN (*Cygnus atratus*)

PARADISE SHELDUCK (*Tadorna variegata*) [E]

BLUE DUCK (*Hymenolaimus malacorhynchos*) – This was the most frustrating of the endemics this year. A few folks saw one flying past them while searching at the Tongariro River near Turangi, but we could not relocate it. And we dipped altogether at the Ruatiti Domain site where locals said they had been missing for nearly a year. [E]

MALLARD (*Anas platyrhynchos*) [I]

PACIFIC BLACK DUCK (*Anas superciliosa*)

AUSTRALIAN SHOVELER (*Anas rhynchotis*)

GRAY TEAL (*Anas gracilis*)

BROWN TEAL (*Anas chlorotis*) – Great looks at this species on Tiri. [E]

NEW ZEALAND SCAUP (*Aythya novaeseelandiae*) [E]

Odontophoridae (New World Quail)

CALIFORNIA QUAIL (*Callipepla californica*) [I]

Phasianidae (Pheasants, Grouse, and Allies)

BROWN QUAIL (*Coturnix ypsilophora*) – Great looks at a pair of birds on Tiri. [I]

RING-NECKED PHEASANT (*Phasianus colchicus*) [I]

WILD TURKEY (*Meleagris gallopavo*) [I]

Podicipedidae (Grebes)

NEW ZEALAND GREBE (*Poliiocephalus rufopectus*) – The NZ Dabchick, we had good looks of this species early on at Strakas Refuge and again at the south end of Lake Taupo. [E]

GREAT CRESTED GREBE (*Podiceps cristatus*)

Spheniscidae (Penguins)

YELLOW-EYED PENGUIN (*Megadyptes antipodes*) – Fantastic encounter with this species at the Penguin Place east of Dunedin. [E]

LITTLE PENGUIN (*Eudyptula minor*)

FIORDLAND PENGUIN (*Eudyptes pachyrhynchus*) – We had really good views of this species on Milford Sound (though viewing conditions were challenging for the first). Also a few seen at Stewart Island. [E]

Diomedidae (Albatrosses)

WHITE-CAPPED ALBATROSS (*Thalassarche cauta cauta*)

SALVIN'S ALBATROSS (*Thalassarche salvini*) – Great to see these so well and good comparisons with White-capped. [E]

CHATHAM ALBATROSS (*Thalassarche eremita*) – One of the real highlights of the trip was an adult bird that showed up on the Hauraki Gulf pelagic trip. [E]

BLACK-BROWED ALBATROSS (BLACK-BROWED) (*Thalassarche melanophris melanophris*)

BLACK-BROWED ALBATROSS (CAMPBELL) (*Thalassarche melanophris impavida*) – One of the birds seen on the Stewart Island boat trip (an adult bird) proved to be a pale-eyed bird of the population breeding on Campbell Island. [E]

ROYAL ALBATROSS (SOUTHERN) (*Diomedea epomophora epomophora*) – A few of these seen nicely on pelagics off of Kaikoura and Stewart Island.

ROYAL ALBATROSS (NORTHERN) (*Diomedea epomophora sanfordi*) – Some nice views of this form banking in the high winds on the Otago Peninsula. [E]

WANDERING ALBATROSS (*Diomedea exulans*)

Procellariidae (Shearwaters and Petrels)

SOUTHERN GIANT-PETREL (*Macronectes giganteus*)

NORTHERN GIANT-PETREL (*Macronectes halli*) – Almost all that were seen were conclusively this species.

CAPE PETREL (*Daption capense*) – One of the most striking and confiding pelagic birds in the southern ocean.

GREAT-WINGED PETREL (GOULDI) (*Pterodroma macroptera gouldi*) – A couple of these were seen briefly on the Kaikoura pelagic. [E]

COOK'S PETREL (*Pterodroma cookii*) – Hundreds were seen on the Hauraki Gulf pelagic. [E]

PYCROFT'S PETREL (*Pterodroma pycrofti*) – We saw a couple of individuals that fit the description of this species (however subtle it is) on our Hauraki Gulf pelagic. [E]

FAIRY PRION (*Pachyptila turtur*) – Including one that fluttered right over the deck after dark on our return from kiwi watching at Stewart Island.

WHITE-CHINNED PETREL (*Procellaria aequinoctialis*) – Great looks at this species on our whale watch off of Kaikoura and also off of Stewart Island.

PARKINSON'S PETREL (*Procellaria parkinsoni*) – We managed to see one or two of these on the Hauraki Gulf pelagic, with excellent side by side comparison with the Flesh-footed Shearwaters. [E]

WESTLAND PETREL (*Procellaria westlandica*) – Not many this year, but we did have a couple of really good views off of Kaikoura. [E]

FLESH-FOOTED SHEARWATER (*Puffinus carneipes*) – Most memorable for their winny squeals while begging behind the boat.

BULLER'S SHEARWATER (*Puffinus bulleri*) – One of the most amazing sightings of the trip was the rafts of hundreds of this species on the Hauraki Gulf pelagic. Wow! [E]

SOOTY SHEARWATER (*Puffinus griseus*)

SHORT-TAILED SHEARWATER (*Puffinus tenuirostris*) – One bird that hung around the boat on the Kaikoura trip may have been this species.

HUTTON'S SHEARWATER (*Puffinus huttoni*) – Huge numbers of these were seen off of Kaikoura. Quite a sight to see them feeding from shore. [E]

FLUTTERING SHEARWATER (*Puffinus gavia*) – In the Hauraki Gulf there were some big rafts of this species. [E]

Hydrobatidae (Storm-Petrels)

WILSON'S STORM-PETREL (*Oceanites oceanicus*)

NEW ZEALAND STORM-PETREL (*Oceanites maorianus*) – The big highlight of the pre-trip Hauraki Gulf pelagic. We saw perhaps as many as 20 of these rare birds. Little Barrier Island is the suspected breeding island for them, though that has yet to be confirmed. Rediscovered in 2003. [E]

GRAY-BACKED STORM-PETREL (*Garrodia nereis*) – Fluttering around the boat at night on Milford Sound, we saw one in the hand that had come aboard.

WHITE-FACED STORM-PETREL (*Pelagodroma marina*) – Amazing to watch this species hopping over the wave tops.

Pelecanoididae (Diving-Petrels)

COMMON DIVING-PETREL (*Pelecanoides urinatrix*) – Lots seen on the pelagics.

Sulidae (Boobies and Gannets)

AUSTRALASIAN GANNET (*Morus serrator*) – Seen on a few different occasions, but most memorably at the Muriwai Beach colony where we could study them up close.

Phalacrocoracidae (Cormorants and Shags)

LITTLE BLACK CORMORANT (*Phalacrocorax sulcirostris*)

GREAT CORMORANT (*Phalacrocorax carbo*)

PIED CORMORANT (*Phalacrocorax varius*)

BRONZE SHAG (*Phalacrocorax chalconotus*) [E]

SPOTTED SHAG (*Phalacrocorax punctatus*) [E]

LITTLE PIED CORMORANT (*Phalacrocorax melanoleucos*)

Ardeidae (Herons, Egrets, and Bitterns)

AUSTRALASIAN BITTERN (*Botaurus poiciloptilus*) – Seen by some as it flew in to a marsh at the south end of Lake Taupo. All of us then heard its loud, booming calls.

GREAT EGRET (*Ardea alba*) – We saw one of these on the west coast somewhere near Hokitika.

WHITE-FACED HERON (*Egretta novaehollandiae*)

PACIFIC REEF-HERON (*Egretta sacra*)

Threskiornithidae (Ibises and Spoonbills)

ROYAL SPOONBILL (*Platalea regia*)

Accipitridae (Hawks, Eagles, and Kites)

SWAMP HARRIER (*Circus approximans*)

Falconidae (Falcons and Caracaras)

NEW ZEALAND FALCON (*Falco novaeseelandiae*) – A really amazing encounter with this species near Glenorchy. There were two birds present, though one really put on a great show for us. It looked mostly in juvenile plumage, though a yellow cere and yellow orbital ring suggested that it was not a bird of the year. [E]

Rallidae (Rails, Gallinules, and Coots)

WEKA (*Gallirallus australis*) – Good views of this species near Milford Sound, and on Stewart and Ulva Islands. [E]

BUFF-BANDED RAIL (*Gallirallus philippensis*)

PURPLE SWAMPHEN (*Porphyrio porphyrio*)

TAKAHE (*Porphyrio mantelli*) – Though Greg is gone, there were still a couple of confiding birds hanging out on Tiri. After a bit of searching, one did show quite well for us. [E]

EURASIAN COOT (*Fulica atra*)

Charadriidae (Plovers and Lapwings)

MASKED LAPWING (*Vanellus miles novaehollandiae*)

PACIFIC GOLDEN-PLOVER (*Pluvialis fulva*)

RED-BREASTED DOTTEREL (*Charadrius obscurus*) – Better known at New Zealand Dotterel. [E]

DOUBLE-BANDED PLOVER (*Charadrius bicinctus*) – Known as Banded Dotterel in New Zealand, we had our first at Foxton Beach, and really close looks at Lake Pukaki. [E]

WRYBILL (*Anarhynchus frontalis*) – Great views of this unique species, beginning with lots at Miranda. [E]

Haematopodidae (Oystercatchers)

SOUTH ISLAND OYSTERCATCHER (*Haematopus finschi*) [E]

VARIABLE OYSTERCATCHER (*Haematopus unicolor*) [E]

Recurvirostridae (Stilts and Avocets)

PIED STILT (*Himantopus leucocephalus*)

BLACK STILT (*Himantopus novaeseelandiae*) – After some searching (and sweating) we connected with two birds along the west shore of Lake Tekapo. This is one of the rarest birds in the world. [E]

Scolopacidae (Sandpipers and Allies)

MARSH SANDPIPER (*Tringa stagnatilis*) – A lone bird at Miranda.

BAR-TAILED GODWIT (*Limosa lapponica*)

RUDDY TURNSTONE (*Arenaria interpres*)

RED KNOT (*Calidris canutus*)

RED-NECKED STINT (*Calidris ruficollis*)

SHARP-TAILED SANDPIPER (*Calidris acuminata*)

Laridae (Gulls, Terns, and Skimmers)

BLACK-BILLED GULL (*Chroicocephalus bulleri*) [E]

RED-BILLED GULL (*Chroicocephalus scopulinus*) [E]

KELP GULL (*Larus dominicanus*)

LITTLE TERN (*Sternula albifrons*) – A few feeding off the beach at Miranda.

FAIRY TERN (*Sternula nereis davisae*) – We were lucky to see this species at Pakiri Beach. This rare subspecies is endemic to North Island. [E]

GULL-BILLED TERN (*Gelochelidon nilotica*) – One or two of these at Foxton Beach were rarities, though they are apparently remnants from a mini-invasion that occurred there last year.

CASPIAN TERN (*Hydroprogne caspia*)

BLACK-FRONTED TERN (*Chlidonias albostratus*) [E]

WHITE-FRONTED TERN (*Sterna striata*)

Stercorariidae (Skuas and Jaegers)

BROWN SKUA (SUBANTARCTIC) (*Stercorarius antarcticus lonnbergi*)

Columbidae (Pigeons and Doves)

ROCK PIGEON (*Columba livia*) [I]

SPOTTED DOVE (*Streptopelia chinensis*) [I]

NEW ZEALAND PIGEON (*Hemiphaga novaeseelandiae*) [E]

Strigopidae (New Zealand Parrots)

KEA (*Nestor notabilis*) – The alpine parrot of South Island. We had one hardy bird that was braving the hard rain and high winds near the Homer Tunnel. The next day, there were a few in evidence in the nicer weather. [E]

NEW ZEALAND KAKA (*Nestor meridionalis*) – We saw both the North and South Island forms. [E]

Psittacidae (Parrots)

RED-FRONTED PARAKEET (*Cyanoramphus novaeseelandiae*) [E]

YELLOW-FRONTED PARAKEET (*Cyanoramphus auriceps*) [E]

EASTERN ROSELLA (*Platycercus eximius*) [I]

Cuculidae (Cuckoos)

SHINING BRONZE-CUCKOO (*Chrysococcyx lucidus*)

LONG-TAILED KOEL (*Eudynamys taitensis*) – A silent and unresponsive bird seen by a couple of folks at Haast Pass. [E]

Strigidae (Owls)

SOUTHERN BOOBOOK (MOREPORK) (*Ninox novaeseelandiae novaeseelandiae*) [E*]

Alcedinidae (Kingfishers)

SACRED KINGFISHER (*Todiramphus sanctus*)

Acanthisittidae (New Zealand Wrens)

RIFLEMAN (*Acanthisitta chloris*) – Active, quick wing flickers seen at few places in good forest on South Island. [E]

SOUTH ISLAND WREN (*Xenicus gilviventris*) – Good looks at a couple of birds near the Homer Tunnel. Known locally as the Rock Wren. [E]

Meliphagidae (Honeyeaters)

TUI (*Prothemadera novaeseelandiae*) – Definitely one of the more charismatic birds of New Zealand woods, and one that has adapted better than most to European settlement. [E]

NEW ZEALAND BELLBIRD (*Anthornis melanura*) – One of the more distinctive singers in native forests, we had a couple of good serenades. [E]

Acanthizidae (Thornbills and Allies)

GRAY GERYGONE (*Gerygone igata*) [E]

Callaeidae (Wattlebirds)

KOKAKO (*Callaeas cinereus*) – We were very fortunate with this species this year on Tiri. Almost gone entirely from the mainland, Tiri has become the most reliable spot to see them. We had a singing bird on the way up to the lighthouse, and a pair of birds grazing near the Brown Teal pond later in the morning. [E]

SADDLEBACK (NORTH ISLAND) (*Philesturnus carunculatus rufusater*) – Though listed here as subspecies, it is worth noting that the Ornithological Society of New Zealand considers there to be two species of saddlebacks. The two differ markedly in voice, and also in appearance. [E]

SADDLEBACK (SOUTH ISLAND) (*Philesturnus carunculatus carunculatus*) – Great studies of a few birds at Ulva Island where a population has been established. [E]

Notiomystidae (Stitchbird)

STITCHBIRD (*Notiomystis cincta*) – Now considered in its own family, this species showed really well for us on Tiri. Basically gone from the mainland. [E]

Cracticidae (Bellmagpies and Allies)

AUSTRALASIAN MAGPIE (*Gymnorhina tibicen*) [I]

Pachycephalidae (Whistlers and Allies)

WHITEHEAD (*Mohoua albicilla*) [E]

YELLOWHEAD (*Mohoua ochrocephala*) – One of the rarest landbirds now, we were fortunate to see it at three locations, Haast Pass, Routeburn, and Ulva Island. The songs varied a good deal between sites. [E]

PIPIPI (*Mohoua novaeseelandiae*) – Also known as Brown Creeper. [E]

Rhipiduridae (Fantails)

NEW ZEALAND FANTAIL (*Rhipidura fuliginosa*) [E]

Petroicidae (Australasian Robins)

TOMTIT (*Petroica macrocephala*) – Was fairly evident once we got to good forest on South Island. [E]

NEW ZEALAND ROBIN (NORTH ISLAND) (*Petroica australis longipes*) – Seen and well heard at Pureora State Forest on North Island. Treated as a separate species by the OSNZ, based on a paper that describes birds on North Island as differing consistently in plumage and size. Probably a pretty tenuous split, but noted here for your consideration. [E]

NEW ZEALAND ROBIN (SOUTH ISLAND) (*Petroica australis australis*) [E]

NEW ZEALAND ROBIN (SOUTH ISLAND) (*Petroica australis rakiura*) – Really confiding birds on Ulva Island. [E]

Alaudidae (Larks)

SKY LARK (*Alauda arvensis*) [I]

Hirundinidae (Swallows)

WELCOME SWALLOW (*Hirundo neoxena*)

Locustellidae (Grassbirds and Allies)

FERNBIRD (*Megalurus punctatus vealeae*) – Great views of the North Island form at the south end of Lake Taupo. [E]

Zosteropidae (Yuhinas, White-eyes, and Allies)

SILVER-EYE (*Zosterops lateralis*)

Turdidae (Thrushes and Allies)

EURASIAN BLACKBIRD (*Turdus merula*) [I]

SONG THRUSH (*Turdus philomelos*) [I]

Sturnidae (Starlings)

COMMON MYNA (*Acridotheres tristis*) [I]

EUROPEAN STARLING (*Sturnus vulgaris*) [I]

Prunellidae (Accentors)

DUNNOCK (*Prunella modularis*) [I]

Motacillidae (Wagtails and Pipits)

AUSTRALASIAN PIPIT (NEW ZEALAND) (*Anthus novaeseelandiae novaeseelandiae*) – One of the more difficult specialty birds to track down. We lucked into a confiding pair on our way to the Pureora Forest. The taxonomy is in need of refinement. The OSNZ considers the NZ birds a

separate species from those in Australia, following Schodde & Mason. Birds here are larger, longer winged and tailed, deeper brown, and with whiter tails than comparative populations.

Emberizidae (Buntings, Sparrows and Allies)

YELLOWHAMMER (*Emberiza citrinella*) [I]

Fringillidae (Siskins, Crossbills, and Allies)

COMMON CHAFFINCH (*Fringilla coelebs*) [I]

EUROPEAN GREENFINCH (*Chloris chloris*) [I]

COMMON REDPOLL (*Acanthis flammea*) [I]

EUROPEAN GOLDFINCH (*Carduelis carduelis*) [I]

Passeridae (Old World Sparrows)

HOUSE SPARROW (*Passer domesticus*) [I]

MAMMALS

OLD WORLD RABBIT (*Oryctolagus cuniculus*) [I]

CAPE HARE (*Lepus capensis*) [I]

BOTTLENOSE DOLPHIN (*Tursiops truncatus*) – It was a spectacular sight to see these leaping out of the water in the Hauraki Gulf.

DUSKY DOLPHIN (*Lagenorhynchus obscurus*) – Some really great looks at these off Kaikoura.

HECTOR'S DOLPHIN (*Cephalorhynchus hectori*) – Thanks to a tip from a local, we tracked down a couple of animals feeding in the surf just north of Kaikoura. This tiny dolphin is an endemic and is threatened by gill netting activities. [E]

SPERM WHALE (*Physeter catodon*) – We were fortunate to spend some time watching Tiaki, a bull Sperm Whale that has been resident in the Kaikoura Trench since 1990. He spent a good deal of time in the deep waters of the trench, clicking to detect prey. We caught him logging at the surface after one such dive.

SHORT-TAILED WEASEL (STOAT) (*Mustela erminea*) [I]

HOKER'S SEA LION (*Phocarcos hookeri*) – We saw a subadult that had come on to the beach in Half Moon Cay, Stewart Island.

NEW ZEALAND FUR SEAL (*Arctocephalus forsteri*)

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

Totals for the tour: 141 bird taxa and 9 mammal taxa