

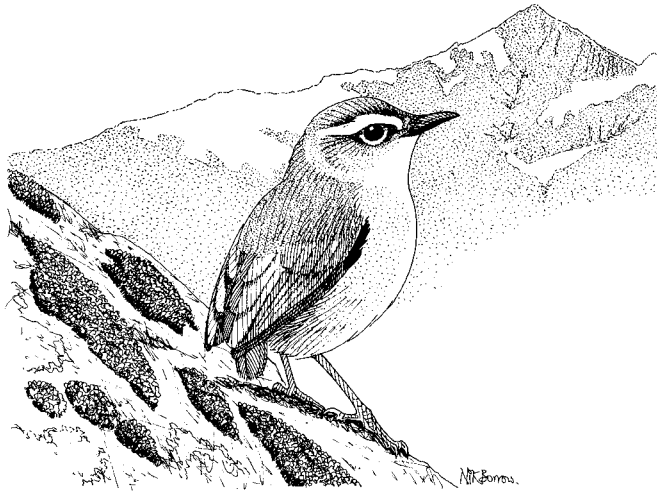
NEW ZEALAND

The Ultimate Endemics and Seabirds Tour

Saturday 23rd October – Sunday 14th November 2010 (23 days)

Leaders: Chris Gaskin and assistant

Group Size Limit: 12



South Island or Rock Wren (Nik Borrow)

New Zealand – the ‘Land of the Long White Cloud’ is the most remote major landmass of the globe. Isolated from the rest of the world for tens of millions of years, New Zealand is now a veritable treasure trove of natural wonders, a living natural history museum that is a reminder of a time now long past - a land of ancient conifers, tree ferns and prehistoric flightless birds, reptiles and insects. A country of contrasting extremes, of high alpine peaks and arid valleys, volcanoes and glaciers, dramatic fjords and towering southern beech forests, surf-swept headlands and bubbling mud pools, New Zealand is also one of the most scenically exciting places on earth.

For the birdwatcher the principal attraction of New Zealand is its exciting mixture of endemic birds (over 50 endemic species occur on the main islands) and the finest collection of pelagic seabirds in the world. Amongst the

endemic birds, it is the four endemic families, comprising the kiwis, the New Zealand wrens, the stitchbirds (recent research has demonstrated that Stitchbird belongs in its own family) and the New Zealand wattlebirds, that are the most sought-after. The remarkable flightless kiwis are nocturnal, using their strong sense of smell (with nostrils near to the tip of the long bill) to locate their prey. Only those willing to creep quietly about at night can hope to see most of the species, and then only if you know the right places. We shall be trying hard to ensure that participants have the opportunity to see up to six species of these bizarre creatures as they snort and sneeze their way through the New Zealand night!

Amongst the many other exciting birds we shall be looking for are the world’s rarest penguin, the Yellow-eyed Penguin, Fiordland Crested Penguin, the highly localized Northern Royal

Albatross, the world’s rarest cormorant, the King Shag, the rare and elusive Blue Duck, the strange Wrybill, the endangered Black Stilt (one of the world’s rarest waders), that curious parrot the Kea and the strange Kokako, a wattlebird with the power of flight so diminished that it is virtually reduced to gliding between trees.

Our itinerary is specifically designed to be the most comprehensive bird tour of New Zealand available, delivering more of the specialities than any other.

We will begin our journey through New Zealand at Auckland in North Island, where we will enjoy a visit to a spectacular colony of Australasian Gannets before visiting the long northern ‘panhandle’ of North Island, where we will be looking for Brown Kiwi, Brown Teal and Fairy Tern.

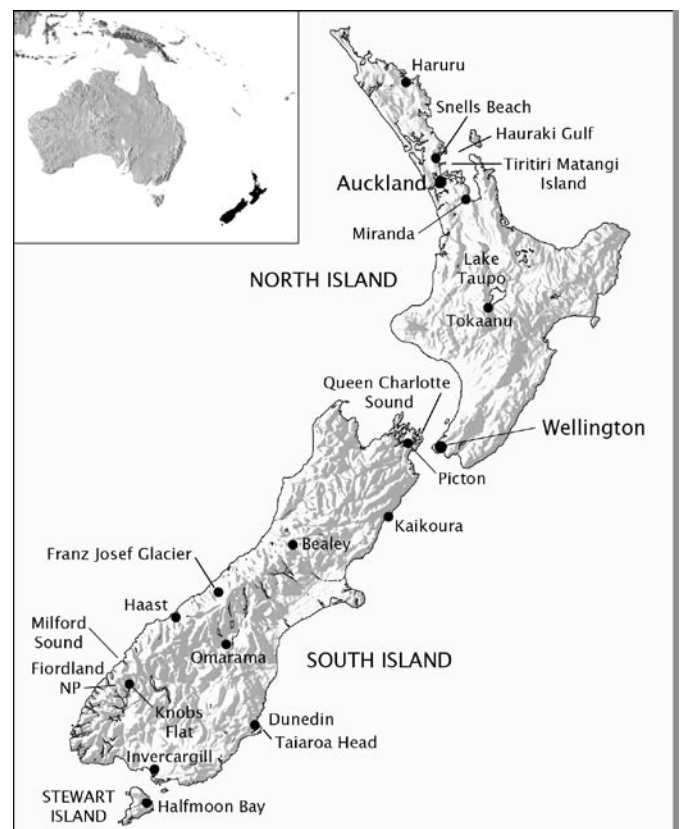
Next we will explore Tiritiri Matangi island in search of its fine assemblage of endemic birds, including the rare Little Spotted Kiwi, the strange Takahe, the rare

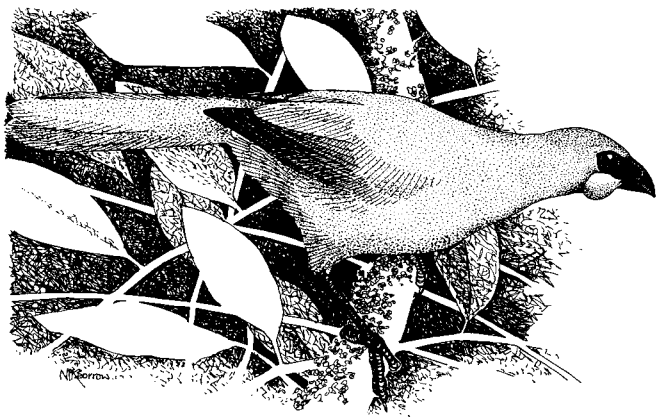
Saddleback and Stitchbird. From here we will travel out by boat into the Hauraki Gulf to look for seabirds, including Black and Cook’s Petrels and the recently rediscovered New Zealand Storm-Petrel.

To the south of Auckland, coastal and wetland habitats should produce Australasian Bittern, the strange Wrybill and the lovely New Zealand Dotterel, while the volcanically active central highlands of North Island, the heart of traditional Maori country, is a place where Blue Ducks haunt the rushing rivers and where the remaining primeval forests are the headquarters of the wonderful Kokako.

After crossing the Cook Strait to northernmost South Island, we shall explore Queen Charlotte Sound with its colony of King Shags and enjoy yet more pelagic seabird riches (including a series of albatrosses, Hutton’s Shearwater and Westland Petrel) off Kaikoura.

Before crossing the spectacular Southern Alps at Arthur’s Pass we will





Kokako (Nik Borrow)

pause to look for the elusive Great Spotted Kiwi and the uncommon Orange-fronted Parakeet, while amidst some more awesome scenery along the Tasman Sea coast we will be looking for Okarito Kiwi, Haast Kiwi and Fiordland Crested Penguin.

From here we will head inland, into the dry Mackenzie Country behind the Southern Alps, where we will explore the valleys, river deltas and lakes near Mount Cook (3764m), the highest peak in New Zealand, which are home to New Zealand Falcons and the critically endangered Black Stilt.

At the Otago Peninsula, near Dunedin, we will visit the famous Northern Royal Albatross colony at Taiaroa Head and also an area where Yellow-eyed Penguins breed.

Next we travel to the huge and spectacular Fiordland National Park in the southwestern corner of the island, home of Keas, South Island (or Rock) Wrens and Pipipis.

After reaching the southernmost extremity of South Island at Invercargill, we will cross to Stewart Island in search of Stewart Island Kiwi and Yellowhead. Stewart Island is one of the best places in New Zealand for seabirds, and so we shall have our final glorious New Zealand pelagic here.

Birdquest has operated tours to New Zealand since 1990.

Itinerary

Day 1 Afternoon flight from London bound for Auckland.

Day 2 In flight (much of the day being 'lost' as we pass rapidly across the time zones).

Day 3 Morning arrival at Auckland, New Zealand's largest city, situated in the northern part of North Island. We will have a spectacular start to the tour at Muriwai Heads, to the west of the city, one of only three mainland breeding colonies of Australasian Gannet in New Zealand, where we can obtain superb views of these spectacular birds at close range without disturbing the colony. After enjoying the spectacle we will head north to a small estuary, where we should find the uncommon Fairy Tern and the lovely New Zealand Dotterel, before continuing to the beautiful Bay of Isles for an overnight stay at Haruru. Other species we should see today include Great, Pied and Little Pied Cormorants, White-faced Heron, Paradise Shelduck, Pacific Black Duck, Swamp Harrier, Australasian Swamphen, Variable Oystercatcher, Masked Lapwing, Ruddy Turnstone, Bar-tailed Godwit, Kelp and Red-billed Gulls, Caspian and White-fronted Terns, Sacred Kingfisher and Welcome Swallow. Rather sadly, and a reflection of how greatly

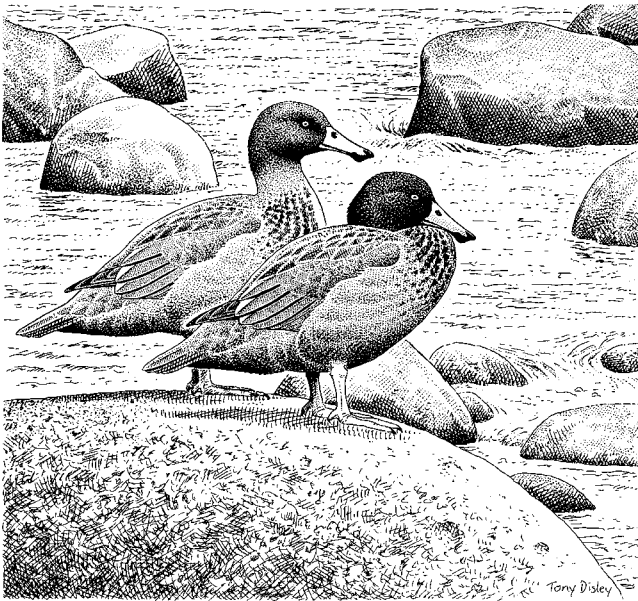
New Zealand's environment has been 'Europeanized', other new birds likely as we travel through northernmost New Zealand include such introductions as Black Swan, Greylag Goose, Mallard, Eastern Rosella, Eurasian Skylark, Common Blackbird, Yellowhammer, Common Chaffinch, European Greenfinch, European Goldfinch, House Sparrow, Common Starling, Common Myna and Australian Magpie! This evening we will go out to look for Brown Kiwi. We will have to walk in silence, listening for these extraordinary birds as they wheeze and snuffle through the forest or its open margins. Careful use of a spotlight should enable us to watch one or two of these emblematic New Zealand birds at relatively close range, an utterly thrilling experience. We will surely hear Morepork (or Southern Boobook) during our kiwi walk, but we will leave observing this common species for another occasion.

Day 4 Before leaving the far north of New Zealand, we will explore some beautiful native forest close to the Bay of Isles. Here, amongst the magnificent kauri trees, we should encounter several New Zealand endemics including the huge and colourful New Zealand Pigeon, Grey Gerygone, the North Island form of the New Zealand Fantail and Tui. We will also visit an estuary where the uncommon Brown Teal is regularly to be found. During the afternoon we will travel south to Snells Beach on the shores of the Hauraki Gulf for an overnight stay.

Day 5 This morning we will travel by boat to Tiritiri Matangi Island for an overnight stay. There is no finer way to see New Zealand's endangered native birdlife than to visit the island sanctuaries of Northland. Introduced predators on the mainland, including rats, stoats and ferrets, have

wrought havoc with the original avifauna, but islands such as Tiritiri Matangi in the Hauraki Gulf provide a last refuge for several vulnerable and endangered species. While on this wonderful island we shall keep a sharp eye out for the attractive Stitchbird, a species now extinct on the mainland (and perhaps the sole representative of its own family, rather than a honeyeater!), and Saddleback, a New Zealand wattlebird now also extinct on the mainland. Both are well established here. A small population of Takahe has been introduced and we can expect to see this prehistoric-looking rail as it creeps through the tall grass, or wanders out in the open near the reserve headquarters. Spotless Crakes inhabit the small ponds, while Red-crowned Parakeets also occurs in good numbers. The melodious calls of the Tui and the New Zealand Bellbird ring through the woodland, Whiteheads are positively abundant and other widespread species we can expect to find include Brown Quail, the North Island form of the Tomtit, New Zealand Robin and Silvereye. The density of passerine birds here is quite extraordinary and gives one an idea of what the native forests on the mainland must have been like before the devastation wrought by introduced predators and other disruptive species. Many of the birds here are extremely tolerant of man and provide superb photographic opportunities. After dark we will go out in search of Little Spotted Kiwi, which we have an excellent chance of observing.

Day 6 This morning we will be picked up by our charter boat and travel out into the open waters of the Hauraki Gulf in order to look for a fantastic selection of seabirds, including Flesh-footed, Buller's, Sooty, Fluttering and Little Shearwaters, Common Diving Petrel, Black and Cook's Petrels, Fairy Prion,



Blue Ducks (Tony Disley)

White-faced Storm-Petrel, Little (or Blue) Penguin and perhaps Pomarine Skua (or Pomarine Jaeger). Our most-wanted bird will, however, be the near-mythical New Zealand Storm-Petrel, which has recently been re-discovered in the waters off Little Barrier Island after a gap of more than a century! Based on recent observations, we have a good chance of success at this time of year. We may also encounter Common and Bottle-nosed Dolphins or even a whale or two. We will spend the night back on the mainland, at Snells Beach.

Day 7 Our first port of call today will be Miranda on the Firth of Thames. The latter is a large bay to the southeast of Auckland where New Zealand's largest concentration of migrant waders from northern Asia can be found during the southern summer. Bar-tailed Godwits are abundant, but there are also smaller numbers of Red Knots and Ruddy Turnstones, and often two or three of the more uncommon visitors such as Far Eastern Curlew, Terek Sandpiper, Sharp-tailed Sandpiper, Curlew Sandpiper and Red-necked Stint. Of greater interest for

us, New Zealand breeding species such as South Island Pied Oystercatcher, White-headed Stilt and New Zealand Dotterel can also be found in this splendid area, along with the strange Wrybill. The Wrybill, which is unique in having a sideways-curving bill, has a population numbering only around 4000 birds, and is declining in the face of introduced predators and hydroelectric schemes. White-fronted Terns breed on the shell banks at the edge of the firth and Black-billed Gulls and Caspian Terns often roost here. Afterwards we will visit a wetland area near Hamilton, where we should see the rare Australasian Bittern. From here we will drive southwards to Tokaanu, situated on the shores of Lake Taupo, for a two nights stay.

Day 8 The very scenic Tongariro National Park to the south of the lake is one of the best areas in New Zealand for the attractive but elusive Blue Duck. This rare and secretive denizen of New Zealand's forested rivers, which prefers stretches of turbulent water, is endangered through habitat loss and is now restricted to remote areas, where it can be hard to find. Other new birds

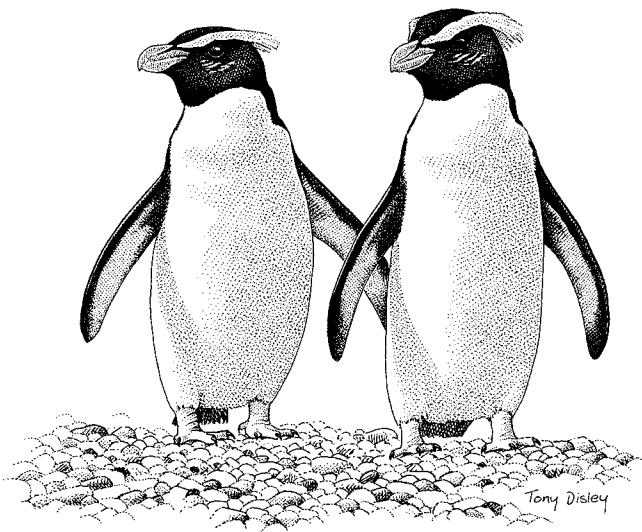
we should encounter in the Lake Taupo region include Australasian Grebe, Little Black Cormorant, Grey Teal, New Zealand Scaup, Kaka, Shining Bronze Cuckoo and the introduced California Quail. We also have another opportunity to look for Brown Kiwi in this area, should we have failed to obtain good views in the far north.

Day 9 We will make an early start this morning in order to arrive at Pureora Forest Park by dawn. Here in so-called 'dinosaur forests' that recall the world of 100 million years ago are superb stands of huge and ancient podocarps, trees with exotic Maori names such as rimu, totara, matai and kahikatea. On the ground grow myriads of ferns whilst the trees are festooned with creepers and epiphytes, the combined effect being to give the forest a decidedly subtropical appearance. In the high canopy lives one of New Zealand's most endangered birds – the Kokako – the sole surviving representative of the wattlebirds remaining on the mainland. As the eastern sky brightens their beautiful calls ring through these majestic forests, a sound never to be forgotten, but we may have to work quite hard to see one high up in the treetops. Later we will drive south Wellington, New Zealand's capital city, at the southern tip of North Island and then take the ferry across to Picton on South Island for an overnight stay.

Day 10 This morning we will cruise along Queen Charlotte Sound, capturing the essential essence of the Marlborough Sounds Maritime Park as we journey through this interface between land and sea where forested peninsulas, notched and scalloped by countless bays, stretch out into waters dotted with islands. The focus of the cruise is White Rocks with their colony of King Shags. Fewer than 400 of this attractive species survive and all are found

in the Marlborough Sounds and Cook Strait. After closely approaching the rocky pinnacles where the shags breed we will explore the much indented coastline. Finally we will call at Motuara Island, where we should see the South Island form of the Saddleback and where some very tame New Zealand Bellbirds and New Zealand Robins will enthral us. We may also be able to see some Little (or Blue) Penguins in their nest boxes. Afterwards we will drive southwards along a spectacular stretch of coastline to Kaikoura for an overnight stay. The waters of the Pacific off Kaikoura hold a remarkable assemblage of marine birds. This afternoon we will travel by boat well offshore and enjoy some superb pelagic birding. Likely species include most of those we will already have encountered off North Island and also the huge Gibson's and Antipodean Albatrosses (split from Wandering, which is also a possibility here), the equally enormous Northern Royal Albatross (and perhaps also Southern Royal), Black-browed Albatross, Campbell Albatross (split from Black-browed), Salvin's Albatross (split from Shy), the endemic Hutton's Shearwater (which breeds at about 1200m above sea-level in the Kaikoura Range), Northern Giant Petrel (and perhaps also Southern Giant), Westland, White-chinned, Cape and perhaps Great-winged Petrels, and Arctic Skua (or Parasitic Jaeger). Dusky Dolphins are both frequent and extremely tame, whilst if we are fortunate we will see Sperm Whale and the endangered Hector's Dolphin. Around Kaikoura town we may see Pacific Reef Egret and the introduced Lesser Redpoll.

Day 11 After another boat trip this morning in search of seabirds and cetaceans we will head for the small settlement of Bealey in the Southern Alps for a two nights stay. Along the way we will



Fiordland Crested Penguins (Tony Disley)

stop to look for Great Crested Grebes of the Australasian population (possibly a distinct species), the strange-looking Cape Barren Goose (it is uncertain whether the New Zealand birds are introduced or naturally occurring) and perhaps Black-fronted Dotterel. We will also enjoy some dramatic scenery as we ascend to Porter's Pass from the Canterbury Plains.

Day 12 Today we will explore the Hawdon Valley, a side valley of the Waimakariri River valley (one of the largest rivers that drain eastwards from the Southern Alps). Here we will search the southern beech forests for the uncommon and localized Orange-fronted Parakeet, now once again treated as a full species, as well as the South Island forms of the New Zealand Fantail and Tomtit. This area is also home to the uncommon Great Spotted Kiwi, the largest kiwi of all, and we shall go out at night to seek this impressive but elusive bird. We are also likely to encounter Southern Boobook (or 'Morepork', after its call), New Zealand's only surviving native owl.

Day 13 Not far from Bealey is Arthur's Pass where, if the weather is good, we will enjoy

some awesome views of the Southern Alps, right under the gaze of Mount Rolleston, the highest peak in the Arthur's Pass National Park. We may see our first Keas here too. Beyond the pass, the descent of the steep Otira Valley is also highly scenic. Eventually we will reach the Tasman Sea coast south of Greymouth and then head southwest to the impressive Franz Joseph Glacier for an overnight stay amidst some awesome scenery. Ancient forests, snow-encrusted peaks (weather permitting!), silver lakes, glistening glaciers and impetuous rivers rushing down to the sea make South Westland an area of outstanding natural beauty. This evening we will search for the restricted-range Okarito Kiwi. With persistence, we stand a good chance of coming across one.

Day 14 Today we will head continue southwards to Haast for an overnight stay. On the way we will stop at a good location for Fiordland Crested Penguin and a place that epitomizes the wild Tasman Sea coast of South Island. This evening we will go out in search of another of the kiwi species that have recently been recognized, the rare and

localized Haast Kiwi.

Day 15 We will leave the Tasman Sea behind today as we head inland to Omarama for an overnight stay, arriving in time for some initial exploration. We will break the journey at the Haast Pass, where the magnificent forests still hold a population of the endangered Yellowhead.

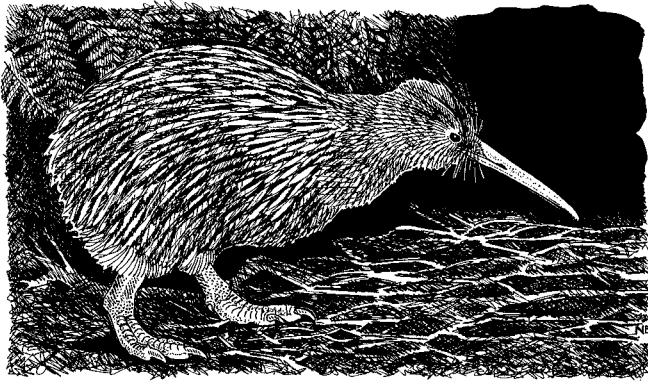
Day 16 In the Omarama and Twizel areas we will search the braided river systems, marshes and inland deltas for a rare inhabitant of the shingle spreads while enjoying some stupendous scenery. The world population of the Black Stilt now numbers under 80 birds, making it one of the rarest waders of all. Resident here in the Mackenzie Country, it has been badly affected by the depredations of introduced ferrets and the population has plummeted. In addition it has suffered through hybridization with the colonizing White-headed (or Pied) Stilt, resulting in a further diminution of the population. Wrybill can also be found breeding here, while another species typical of these habitats is Double-banded Plover. We should find Australasian Shoveler, Common (or Eurasian) Coot and Black-fronted Tern in the wetlands, and Australasian Pipit amongst the dry tussock grassland. The uncommon and impressive New Zealand Falcon can turn up almost anywhere in South Island, but this area offers one of our best chances. Provided the weather is good we will enjoy truly spectacular views of Mount Cook (at 3764m, New Zealand's tallest mountain) and the surrounding snow-covered Southern Alps. During the afternoon we will travel to the Dunedin area for a two nights stay. We will stop along the way at a good area for Baillon's Crane, although we will need some luck to see one.

Day 17 This morning we will visit an area on the Otago Peninsula where the large

and impressive Yellow-eyed Penguin nests. Later we will visit Taiaroa Head at the entrance to Otago Harbour. Here we will see the only mainland colony of the Northern Royal Albatross, one of the largest flying birds on earth. We will be able to watch these huge birds gracefully sailing back and forth as they approach or leave the colony, and watch some of the adults at their nest sites. Nearer sea level is a large colony of Stewart Island Shags and smaller numbers of Spotted Shags, which at this time of year will include many birds in full breeding plumage. After dinner we will have an opportunity to take a night walk through an active colony of Little (or Blue) Penguins and Sooty Shearwaters. Another new bird we should encounter in the Dunedin area is Royal Spoonbill.

Day 18 Today we will travel via Te Anau to Knobs Flat in Fiordland National Park, for a two nights stay. We will arrive in time for some initial exploration of the park.

Day 19 Here in this far-flung corner of New Zealand the ocean and the mountains have created an incomparable landscape – the wildest, wettest, grandest and most remote part of the islands. We will visit the lakes, rivers, fjords and superb subantarctic beech forests that are characteristic of the area in search of their varied birdlife. Species of interest in this area include New Zealand Falcon, Yellow-crowned Parakeet, Rifleman (one of the New Zealand wrens), Pipipi (or Brown Creeper) and the South Island form of the Tomtit. The secretive Long-tailed Koel can often be heard, and we have a good chance of seeing one here. The Eglinton Valley was formerly well known for its Yellowheads, a species once widespread in South Island but now localized and scarce. However, a recent population decline, probably induced by Stoat predation,



Stewart Island Kiwi (Nik Borrow)

has made it very hard to find in this area. As we follow the road towards Milford Sound we come to the scenic Upper Hollyford Valley with its superb alpine meadows and boulder fields under towering, snow-capped peaks. Along the Hollyford River we will have another opportunity to find the elusive Blue Duck. Further up the valley a small glacial basin at the headwaters of the Hollyford River is one of the few accessible areas in which the delightful South Island (or Rock) Wren can be seen. Undisturbed for most of their lives by humans, these tiny but often elusive birds can be readily approached amongst the spectacular fields of Mount Cook Lilies, New Zealand Foxgloves and Wild Spaniards. As we search for the wrens we will be surrounded by sheer rock walls and some of the most impressive alpine scenery in New Zealand. We will also be watching out for that large alpine parrot, the Kea, which sometimes pays a visit to rob the unwary of lunch, gloves or lens caps! Providing we have time, we will have an opportunity to admire the spectacular beauty of Milford

Sound during a boat trip. At the head of the sound we will look for Fiordland Crested Penguins standing guard along the rocky shoreline.

Day 20 This morning we will drive to Invercargill, at the southernmost extremity of South Island, where we will look for the rather secretive New Zealand Fernbird. From Invercargill we will cross by ferry to Stewart Island for a two nights stay at Halfmoon Bay. This evening, weather permitting, we will make a boat trip to a remote headland where, after creeping silently through the dense forest, we will arrive after dark at a sandy beach where Stewart Island Kiwis (or Tokoekas) have developed the habit of coming out into the open to feed along the tideline. Our guide knows the birds and the area intimately, so we have an excellent chance of being able to watch one or two at relatively close range.

Day 21 This beautiful island and its offshore islets provide a home for land birds which have become rare on the mainland and for countless oceanic birds. Today we

will travel well offshore by charter boat. We can expect some incredible views of albatrosses, petrels and shearwaters all around us, for here we are at one of the seabird capitals of the world. White-capped Albatross (split from Shy) is numerous and we should also see Southern Royal Albatross, Southern Giant Petrel and Subantarctic Skua. There is also a good chance of seeing Buller's (or Southern Buller's) Albatross. In addition, we are likely to turn up one or two of the rarer visitors such as Mottled Petrel or Broad-billed Prion, or possibly even Antarctic Tern. We should also see a few Yellow-eyed Penguins and Fiordland Crested Penguins, both of which nest in small numbers on islets off Halfmoon Bay.

Day 22 Yellowhead and the South Island form of the Saddleback have been introduced to a predator-free Ulva Island in Patterson Inlet and this morning we will have another opportunity to encounter these endangered species, as well as Weka (a bold, chicken-sized rail that has become very accustomed to visitors). Later we will return to Invercargill and catch a flight to Auckland where we connect with an evening flight bound for London.

Day 23 Morning arrival at London.

Accommodation & Road

Transport: The hotels/motels are of normal Birdquest standard almost throughout. On Tiritiri Matangi we will spend one night in simple but clean bunk-house accommodation owned by the reserve, with a number of

people in each room. Road transport will be by minibus and roads are good.

Walking: The walking effort is easy almost throughout, but there are a few harder walks and those wanting to look for Orange-fronted Parakeet will have to ford a few streams.

Climate: Rather variable. In North Island conditions will be warm or hot, with dry, sunny periods interspersed with overcast spells and rain. In South Island and on Stewart Island it will range from distinctly cool to warm with a mixture of dry and sunny or overcast and wet weather.

Bird Photography:

Opportunities are quite good.

Tour Price: £5360, €6325, \$8844 London/London (or £4100, €4838, \$6765 Auckland/Invercargill). Price includes all transportation (including all flights), all accommodations, all meals, bottled water, some drinks, all excursions, all entrance fees, leader services. Tipping is not customary in New Zealand.

Single Room Supplement:

£594, €701, \$980 (excluding Tiritiri Matangi).

Deposit: £540, €637, \$891. If booking more than 12 months before departure, the initial deposit is only £150, €177, \$248.

Part-Tour Option: Subject to space being available, it is possible to take any part of this tour (for example, North Island alone, or just South Island). Please contact us for further information.