

North, South, Stewart and Chatham Islands

New Zealand is a truly beautiful country with a low human population and spectacular scenery especially in the alpine zones of South Island. This comprehensive tour of the country takes in all the major birding sites including an optional extension to the rarely visited archipelago of the remote Chatham Islands. We have the opportunity to find almost fifty endemic birds during our tour, including five species of Kiwi, Fiordland Crested and Yellow-eyed Penguins, Blue Duck, Takahe, Wrybill, Kea, Kaka, North Island and South Island Saddlebacks and Yellowhead. On the Chatham Islands, a further seven endemics occur and we have a good chance of locating Chatham and Pitt Shags, Shore Plover, Chatham Oystercatcher and Chatham Parakeet. New Zealand is also a prime location for seabirds including a wide-range of albatrosses, shearwaters and the recently rediscovered New Zealand Storm Petrel.

■ The following itinerary is easily the best on offer by any UK birding company for New Zealand's unique birds.

■ The tour and duration can be extended with regard to flights if you wish to visit relatives or extend your stay in New Zealand.

Days 1-2: An evening flight with Air New Zealand to Auckland. The second day is lost due to the International Date Line. Arrival is early on Day 3.

Day 3: One of our first stops is a forested area near to central Auckland for an introduction to some of New Zealand's forest species – North Island Tomtit, New Zealand Pigeon, Grey Fantail, and Grey Gerygone. We then head to a spot on the rugged west coast for Australasian Gannet, Pied Shag, Red-billed Gull and White-fronted Terns. We head back across to the east coast via an area renowned for Laughing Kookaburra. Several wetlands are visited for New Zealand Scaup, New Zealand Grebe, Grey Teal, Australasian Shoveler, Pacific Black Duck and Paradise Shelduck and, in the mangroves, Buff-banded Rail. Transfer to Tounson followed by an after dinner walk to look for Northern Brown Kiwi and Morepork.

Day 4: This morning we head east to a small estuary for the critically endangered Fairy Tern. Other species present include New Zealand Plover, Variable Oystercatcher and Pied Stilts. Several estuarine areas further south may have

Dates

Sunday February 4th - Monday
February 26th 2018*

*Extension to the Chatham Islands
until March 3rd

Leaders: Phil Hammond and Mark
Finn

Group size: 8
Birds: 155-170

Australasian Pipit and Australasian Little Grebe. Transfer to Warkworth for two nights.

Day 5: Today is spent in the beautiful Hauraki Gulf. Leaving from Sandspit, we head out towards Little Barrier Island. The main focus of the day is to locate seabirds including the recently rediscovered New Zealand Storm Petrel. Other possibilities include Black and Cook's Petrels, Buller's, Flesh-footed, Fluttering and Little Shearwaters, and White-faced Storm Petrel.

Day 6: Today, we head to one of New Zealand's most incredible birding locations at Tiritiri Matangi. We take a short ferry ride



Blue Duck Photo: Brent Stephenson

out to the island and make an initial exploration of the reserve for North Island Saddleback, Kokako, Stitchbird, Takahe, Brown Teal, and Red-crowned Parakeet. Other forest birds include Whitehead, Tui, New Zealand Bellbird, and North Island Robin. On the small pools we should see the shy Spotless Crake. After dinner, we head out looking for Morepork and Little Spotted Kiwi.

Day 7: From Tiritiri Matangi we head south to one of New Zealand's premier shorebird sites, Miranda, in the Firth of Thames. We are likely to see Wrybill, Red-necked Stint, New Zealand Plover, Banded Dotterel, Variable and South Island Oystercatchers, Black-billed Gull, and Caspian Tern. During the summer months, there are usually a few rarer waders – Sharp-tailed, Pectoral, Marsh, or Terek Sandpipers.

Day 8: We travel across the Coromandel Peninsula to Whitianga on the eastern side of the peninsula. The afternoon is spent on a pelagic trip to target Pycroft's Petrel which breeds on nearby islands, but it also gives us a chance of Common Diving

Petrel, Fairy Prions and other seabirds. Overnight in Whitianga.

Day 9: We head back across the Coromandel Peninsula making a stop at a swamp for Australasian Bittern. However, our main focus for the day is the Pureora Forest Park to the west of Lake Taupo. This extensive area of forest is one of the best places in North Island to see New Zealand Kaka, Yellow-crowned Parakeet, Long-tailed Koel, Shining Bronze Cuckoos and Rifleman. We will also be on the look-out for New Zealand Falcon which inhabits this area. Travel to Turangi where we overnight.

Day 10: This morning we concentrate our efforts around Turangi looking for the rare and localised Blue Duck which prefers swift-flowing mountain streams. In the afternoon, we head east to a forested area between Taupo and Napier. North Island Robin and Kokako have been reintroduced here. New Zealand Falcon and New Zealand Fernbird are also in the area. Overnight in Napier.

Day 11: We travel to Foxton with a diver-

sion en route for Eastern Rosella and Sulphur-crested Cockatoo. The Manawatu Estuary is one of the best sites in New Zealand for shorebirds and we should see Bar-tailed Godwit, Red Knot, and have further chances of Wrybill.

Day 12: Depending on tide times, we visit the Manawatu Estuary again. We then head south along the scenic Kapiti Coast towards Wellington, making several stops on the way to see Black-fronted Dotterel and waterfowl. The Inter-islander ferry leaves from Wellington, heading across to South Island via the Cook Strait. From the relatively stable platform of the ferry, this is an excellent stretch of water to look for Spotted Shag, Fairy Prion and, depending on weather conditions and prevailing winds, Wandering, White-capped and Salvin's Albatross, Northern Giant Petrel, Westland Petrel and Sooty Shearwaters. Common Diving Petrel and Little Penguin are often seen near the entrance to the Marlborough Sound. The ferry docks in Picton where we overnight.

Day 13: Today, we head out onto the Marlborough Sounds, further exploring Queen Charlotte Sound. Our main target for the morning is Rough-faced Shag, a rare endemic with a population of only about 650 birds. We have the opportunity to make stops at two small island sanctuaries where we will try for Orange-fronted Parakeet, South Island Saddleback, South Island Robin, New Zealand Pigeon and New Zealand Bellbird. Back in Picton at midday and then south to Kaikoura, our base for two nights.

Day 14: In the morning we take a pelagic trip off Kaikoura. Due to the depth of the Kaikoura canyon just offshore, we are able to be in water 4,000m deep within half an hour, allowing us to get really close to the seabirds. Sightings may include Northern, Southern, Royal, Wandering, Black-browed, Campbell, White-capped, and Salvin's Albatross. On top of this add Cape, Westland and White-chinned Petrels, the endemic Hutton's shearwater, plus the potential for other species like Grey-faced Petrel, Southern Giant Petrel, Sooty and

Short-tailed Shearwaters. Return to Kaikoura with the afternoon at leisure.

Day 15: Today we head deep into the Southern Alps through to Arthur's Pass, making several stops along the way, and passing through some exceptionally scenic alpine areas. Our target bird today is the inquisitive Kea. On the way, we pass several rivers that are breeding sites for Black-fronted Terns. We should also catch up with some of the South Islands' forest species: New Zealand Brown Creeper, Yellow-fronted Parakeet and South Island Robin. We check into our accommodation near Arthur's Pass and after dinner we venture out to listen for Great Spotted Kiwi.

Day 16: This morning we head west, up and over the Pass and on to the stunning West Coast. As we approach our destination town of Franz Josef, we can head into the glacial valley to admire views of the Franz Josef glacier or head out to the coast to see Great Egret and Royal Spoonbill. We aim to be at our accommodation by late afternoon as after dinner we have a night excursion for Okarito Brown Kiwi which has a population of around 400 birds.

Day 17: Today we head south towards the township of Haast, stopping at one or two places on the way for Fiordland Crested Penguins which breed at sites along this coast. From Haast, we head inland through some spectacular mountain scenery, with our focus being a



Storm Petrel Photo: Brent Stephenson



Kaka Photo: Brent Stephenson

visit to Haast Pass. This site is home to a number of forest species and in the past has had the endangered Yellowhead. However, the site is good for New Zealand Kaka, Yellow-crowned Parakeet, Rifleman, South Island Tomtit, New Zealand Brown Creeper and Long-tailed Koel. We then travel to the beautiful lake-side town of Wanaka where we spend the night.

Day 18: Basically a travel day passing through some of New Zealand's most spectacular scenery, heading towards Milford Sound. Our focus, however, will be to make a stop in alpine habitat for South Island Wren, one of the World's most primitive passerines. We spend the night at Te Anau.

Day 19: Today we are heading for the third main island of New Zealand – Stewart Island. Depending on the sea and weather conditions, the one-hour ferry crossing can be excellent for Southern Royal, White-capped, and Salvin's Albatross, Mottled and Cape Petrels, Fairy Prion, and Brown Skua. On arrival on the island, we should see the range-restricted Stewart Shag. In

the afternoon, we visit Ulva Island, a predator-free sanctuary and home to Yellowhead, South Island Saddleback, and commoner forest species. After dinner, we take an excursion to observe Southern Brown Kiwi, an unforgettable experience.

Day 20: Stewart Island pelagic. Today we plan to do a pelagic which is weather dependent. The distance and direction of travel will depend on the situation. With such a close proximity to the Southern Ocean, and large seabird colonies being on many of the surrounding islands, we may be able to find an excellent array of seabirds. Particular target birds are Fiordland Crested and Yellow-eyed Penguins, Buller's Albatross, Northern and Southern Giant Petrels, Mottled and Cook's Petrels, Broad-billed and Fairy Prions.

Day 21: We leave Stewart Island on the morning ferry and travel northwards towards Oamaru, taking in the very scenic Catlins Coast. This coastal section is renowned for its scenic views and rough weather beaten coastline. Our goal is to arrive at Oamaru in the late afternoon and

New Zealand

visit a beach to watch Yellow-eyed Penguins coming ashore. Night in Oamaru

Day 22: We again head inland, this time into one of the driest parts of the South Island – the arid Mackenzie basin. With stunning glacial lakes, mountains, and red tussocks, the scenery and birds will be amazing. The focus of the day is the world's rarest shorebird, Black Stilt, with a population of around 100 wild birds. Along the way, we may see New Zealand Falcon, Chukar, and waterbirds Great Crested Grebe and the difficult-to-see Baillon's Crake. On a clear day, we should have views of New Zealand's highest mountain, Mount Cook. Night at Omarama.

Day 23: We head northwards towards Christchurch airport where the tour concludes and clients take onward departures to Europe. If taking the Chatham Islands extension, overnight in Christchurch.

Day 24: Today we fly to the outlying Chatham Islands from Christchurch and transfer to our accommodation.

Day 25: A full-day pelagic starting from Owenga on the southeast coast. Our first destination is a group of rocks called the Star Keys holding two endemic shags, Pitt Island and Chatham. From here we visit South East Island, home to the rare and endangered Shore Plover which often feeds on rock platforms. We then head out to Pyramid Rock, home to 4,500 breeding pairs of Chatham Albatross. Next on the agenda are Mangere and Little Mangere Islands, home to Chatham Parakeet. Other seabirds we may encounter during our time at sea include Northern Royal Albatross, Northern and Southern Giant Petrels, Fulmar and Broad-billed Prions, White-faced and, possibly, Grey-backed Storm Petrels and Brown Skuas.

Day 26: This morning we take a flight by small plane to Pitt Island, a unique place with only a handful of inhabitants. Here we meet our local guide and take a tour of the island. Top of the list is a visit to Caravan Bush where we have great opportunities to see Chatham Tui, Chatham Gerygone,

Chatham Tomtit and Red-crowned Parakeet. We will learn about the exciting project to translocate endangered Chatham Petrels to this area. Later in the day, we seek out the endemic Pitt and Chatham Shags. We have lunch with locals at Flowerpot, the only settlement on Pitt Island.

Day 27: Today we head north by road visiting several beaches where we hope to find the endemic Chatham Oystercatcher and Chatham Pipit. After lunch we head southwest to visit the largest remaining patch of forest on Main Chatham, Tuku Nature Reserve. The forest is home to the enormous Chatham Pigeon, Red-crowned Parakeet and Chatham Gerygone. The Awatotara Valley is a forest-patch, a beautiful place in which to study these unique birds.

Day 28: Morning flight to Auckland with onward connections to Europe where arrival is on the next day.

Prices

Ground Price: £6,500
Single room: £800
Deposit: £500
*Air Fare: £1,100
Chatham Extension: £2,995
Single room: £ n/a
Air Fare: £450

This holiday is fully inclusive of ferry journey, boat trips, accommodation and meals including a (continental) breakfast, transport, guidance and taxes.

Not included: drinks, items of a personal nature, insurance. Any extra excursions not mentioned in the itinerary.

Accommodation: On Tiritiri, the accommodation is in bunkhouses and shared for the evening.

**Please refer to our terms and conditions relating to flights*