

Trip Report New Zealand 2004

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23-11-2004 till 16-12-2004

For more info, comments, questions etc please contact us at info@splatzone.nl.
See also <http://www.splatzone.nl/newzealand/newzealand.htm>

General Information

Birding New Zealand

Once completely dominated by birds, New Zealand proved to be a natural experiment in the evolution of birds. Consequently some of the weirdest birds live in New Zealand. Unfortunately things have changed since the last 400/500 years and this fragile ecosystem is taken over by all kinds of introduced species. Dozens of bird species became extinct and a lot more became threatened of which some are at present among the rarest birds in the world. Introduced birds took over the landscape and at present they are more common than the natives.

But there is hope. More and more islands are made predator free and reintroduction of rare species like **Stitchbird** (*Notiomystis cincta*, Geelbandhoningeter) and **Saddleback** (*Philesturnus carunculatus*, Zadelrugspreeuw) -completely gone from the mainland- are doing well on those islands. Even the presumed extinct **Takahe** (*Porphyrio mantelli* - Takahe) has a new future on those islands. Fortunately most of those islands are welcoming visitors. Additionally pest control on the mainland is working well at some spots and a relatively big part of the New Zealand landscape is officially protected.

New Zealand has traditionally been a very popular tourist destination, consequently the country has a well developed tourist infrastructure. The country also has a long history of bird watching visitors. Combined with the fact that almost everybody is hooked to the internet, this makes preparing a trip to New Zealand an ease. The extreme diversity of landscapes including some of the most dramatic ones on earth makes a trip to New Zealand a must to travelling birders. Yet, in my opinion, the fun of birding in New Zealand is tempered significantly by the abundance of introduced European birds and the scarcity of the native birds. Only the impressively abundant sea life including seabirds like albatrosses, petrels and prions make up for the lack of mainland birding fun.

Don't expect to collect a big birding list. The mean three week expectation does not exceed 100 species, plus an additional 25 introduced species. As can be expected a big part of this list will be seabirds, collected at several pelagics and ferry rides.

Strategy

In my humble opinion there's really only two ways of birding by overseas visitors: twitching the rare and endangered land birds and sea birding. The first can be hard work

as some of the specialties can prove hard to get while the last is one of the greatest birding experiences I had in my birding career. So my first advise is: make sure you fit several pelagics into your itinerary.

Finding all the endemics in one trip with limited time might prove impossible, especially since the brown kiwi complex is split into four different species. See the **Finding the endemics** section for details on this topic. A three week trip is definitely too short to do the country justice. Four weeks might be enough to find most of the mainland endemics when all works out well and weather is not interfering too much. Six weeks and more gives you time to see most of the country and enjoy the landscape.

A good preparation is the key to a successful birding trip in New Zealand. Most pelagics are scheduled so you should find a way to plan them into your itinerary. Some excursions should be booked months prior to the trip, but on the other hand you might need more time at some spots if the weather is bad or the birds don't cooperate. So it can be very difficult to make a proper trip plan. The following actions should be taken way ahead of your arrival in New Zealand:

- *) any scheduled pelagic, like the Hauraki Gulf pelagic (p.a. [Pterodroma Pelagics](#))
 - *) a visit and an overnight stay to [Tiritiri Matangi](#) (click link for more info), even the ferry to Tiri ([Fullers](#)) can be full booked and should be booked in advance.
 - *) the 'Stewart Island' **Brown Kiwi** excursion with Philip Smith
- Other trips can be booked only days in advance making it possible to change the planning if necessary:

- *) [Queen Charlotte Sound nature trips](#)
- *) [Kaikoura albatross pelagics](#)
- *) Doubtful and Milford Sound excursions (p.a. [Realyourneys](#))

Almost all the specialties can be found without help but some can take a while. Kiwis are always difficult to get your eyes on, an organized tour to find those is advisable. The company [Wrybill Tours](#) is willing to help you plan your itinerary, to give advise on good birding spots and to tour you around to find specialties. Some bird species will need special action. For example to see the recently rediscovered **New Zealand Storm Petrel** you should arrange a pelagic in the Hauraki Gulf near Auckland. An option is with [Pterodroma Pelagics](#). Finding for example **Pycrofts Petrel** you best arrange a pelagic out to Red Mercury Island from Whitianga (no regular pelagics from there).

To get a good sea bird list you best try to hook on pelagic trips from:

- *) North Island: Hauraki Gulf or Whitianga (NZ Storm Petrel, Cook's Petrel, Black Petrel, Pycroft's Petrel)
- *) South Island: Kaikoura (albatrosses, Hutton's Shearwater, Westland Petrel)
- *) Stewart Island (Mottled Petrel, Buller's Albatross)

Also the ferry Wellington - Picton and to Stewart Island can be rewarding for sea birds. A tip for those with boat problems (motion sickness): we bought "Sealegs" and used it several times and this stuff worked very well. We are both not very good on boats but we had no problems after using Sealegs. Sealegs can be bought at about all the pharmacists in New Zealand. It does make you a bit drowsy afterward so don't plan to much activity after a pelagic with Sealegs.

See the section **Finding the endemics** for details on specific species. See also the sections for specific information on that spot.

Renting a car is relatively cheap and easy. Infrastructure is great all over the country and camping in the wild is even encouraged. You might consider renting a residential vehicle but those are a bit more expensive.

In the section **Itinerary** we added information on prices of the different accommodation and excursions.

Books and maps

We used the following bird guides:

The hand guide to the birds of New Zealand by Hugh Robertson & Barrie Heather and illustrated by Derek Onley (1999). This is the small version of the book, lacking the detailed species information. This version is good enough for visiting birders but background information is limited. For example the rarity of vagrants is not mentioned. Subspecies information of species like albatrosses is very limited and additional footage on this topic is advised.

The complete guide to Antarctic Wildlife by Hadoram Shirihai and illustrated by Brett Jarrett (2002). Great book, good reading and useful background information on sea birds and mammals. We didn't take the whole book (too heavy) but made colour copies of most of the 25 plates. Especially the text describing the several subspecies of albatrosses including lots of identification hints is extremely useful.

Birds of New Zealand - Locality guide by Stuart Chambers (2000). Still the best guide for finding good birding spots, but some information is outdated. This book has the disadvantage that it covers too many topics! It includes a section on identification of NZ birds which is partly redundant but partly useful in addition to the hand guide. Every described bird has a where to find section but this information is not standardised and the fact that no maps are provided makes it very difficult to use the book for planning an itinerary. Some spots don't produce the target birds mentioned anymore and that also makes it difficult to plan a trip by this book.

Where to watch birds in Australasia & Oceania by Nigel Wheatley (1998). This book also covers New Zealand. Only a few spots are mentioned but these spots are very relevant and the information is still exceptionally up to date.

The following road map was good enough to find our way around:

New Zealand Road Atlas by Kiwi Maps. This map book has enough detail to find your way, even in cities. Detailed maps are provided for all major cities. It is easy to get it in New Zealand, for example at most car rental companies.

Accommodation

It is easy to find proper accommodation all over the country. Camping is easy and it is stimulated to camp in the wild. We didn't camp since the weather was a bit too cold and wet. We mostly used cabins and onsite vans on campgrounds. Cabins are mostly between NZ \$ 40,- and \$ 50,-. The "Holiday Park" cabins, available in most larger cities are very good and advisable. Most cabins have up to 6 beds.

Here's some accommodation advise:

Miranda Shorebird Centre: at walking distance from great birding including one of the best spots to find **New Zealand Dotterel** (*Charadrius obscurus*, Rosse Plover). Price for one night: \$ 50,-. Contact information:

Miranda Shorebird Centre

Firth of Thames,
283 East Coast Rd,
R.D. 3, POKENO,
New Zealand
Phone / Fax: +64 9 232 2781
Email: info@miranda-shorebird.org.nz
www.miranda-shorebird.org.nz

Tui Song - Stuart and Allison Chambers: beautifully situated in Orewa, just north of Auckland and a good place to stay before heading to Tiritiri Matangi (about 1 hour drive). Birding around their premises and in the area is good, with species like **New Zealand Grebe** (*Poliiocephalus rufopectus*, Nieuwzeelandfuut) present and **Tui** (*Prosthemadera novaeseelandiae*, Toei) very common. Contact information:

Tui Song Homestay

21 Puriri Ave, Orewa, New Zealand
Phone (09) 427 5336
Fax (09) 427 5669
Email: as_chambers@xtra.co.nz
www.geocities.com/tuisonghomestay

Tiritiri Matangi dorm: it is advisable to stay a night on Tiritiri Matangi, especially to find **Little Spotted Kiwi** (*Apteryx owenii*, Kleine Grijze Kiwi). Overnight stay is possible in dorms. Contact information:

Phone number +64-9-476 0010
E-mail: tiritirimatangifb@doc.govt.nz
www.123.co.nz/tiri/default.htm

At all other places accommodation is no problem and is offered in good variety. Only twice we had a problem finding last minute accommodation: in Whitianga due to a triple marriage in town and in Queenstown a lot was fully booked during our stay.

Relevant links

Trip reports and web portals

<www.travellingbirder.com> Great portal to a huge amount of birding trip reports all over the world. Updated frequently with new reports.

<www.camacdonald.com/birding> Links do not always work but this site is a good start.
<www.birdtours.co.uk> This is a great site with a huge number of trip reports. Certainly good to check while preparing the trip.
<www.fatbirder.com> Covering almost all countries of the world. Lot of information, lot of links.
<www.bsc-eoc.org/links/links.jsp> Over 18000 links to about all the worlds regions. Including information on numbers of species and endemics.
<www.crosswinds.net/~birdtrips/tripreports> This used to be one of the greatest sites to find trip reports. Still a lot of trip reports but no recent reports are added any more.

New Zealand

<<http://www.wrybill-tours.com/>> Wrybill Tours is run by two of the best local birders Brent Stephenson and Sav Saville. They offer pre-trip consultancy, itinerary advise and custom tours.
<<http://www.123.co.nz/tiri/default.htm>> Background information on the conservation project Tiritiri Matangi, one of the essential spots to go.
<<http://www.miranda-shorebird.org.nz/>> Information about Miranda Shorebirds Centre including recent sightings and accommodation information.
<http://www.fullers.co.nz/index.php/pi_pageid/25> Fullers ferries offer ferry trips to Tiritiri Matangi departing in Auckland and in Gulf Harbour.
<<http://www.haurakigulfseabirds.co.nz/>> Pterodroma Pelagics arranges pelagics in the Hauraki Gulf near Auckland.
<<http://www.gaytravel.net.nz/nz/InterIslander.html>> The Interislander is the Wellington <-> Picton (North-South Island) ferry. This ferry should be booked a few days in advance.
<<http://www.naturetours.co.nz/>> Dolphin Watch Ecotours, trips by boat in the Queen Charlotte Sound. King Shag nearly guaranteed!
<<http://www.oceanwings.co.nz/albatross/>> Kaikoura Albatross Encounter. This could well become your greatest experience in New Zealand!
<<http://www.whalewatch.co.nz/>> Kaikoura Whale watch specialists.
<<http://www.oceanwanderers.com/NewZeal.html>> General information on seabirding in New Zealand, including several usefull links.
<<http://www.foveauxexpress.co.nz/>> Site of the Stewart Island Ferry Foveauxexpress.
<<http://www.realjourneys.co.nz/>> Realyourneys arrange daytrips in Milford and Doubtful Sounds in Fjordlands NP.

Itinerary - daily trip log

23-11-2004: Finally, after a trip of over 30 hours we arrived at Auckland International Airport. It took a while before we collected our rental car (Britz) but around 3 p.m. we were on the road. Weather was quite nice but chilly. A first stop close to the airport gave us our first impression of the abundance of introduced birds. Apart from **House Sparrow** (*Passer domesticus*, Huismus) and **Common Starling** (*Sturnus vulgaris*, Spreeuw) - species that have become common in more parts of the world- a whole bunch of other Europeans showed up: **European Greenfinch** (*Carduelis chloris*, Groenling), **European Goldfinch** (*Carduelis carduelis*, Putter), **Yellowhammer** (*Emberiza citrinella*,

Geelgors), **Song Thrush** (*Turdus philomelos*, Zanglijster) and **Eurasian Skylark** (*Alauda arvensis*, Veldleeuwerik). Among them were our first natives: **White-faced Heron** (*Egretta novaehollandiae*, Witwangreiger), **Kelp Gull** (*Larus dominicanus*, Kelpmeeuw) and **Welcome Swallow** (*Hirundo neoxena*, Welkomzwaluw).

We drove directly to Miranda where we had arranged an overnight stay at the [Miranda Shorebird Centre](#) (NZ \$ 50,-). Met with Keith Woodley, the manager of the centre, who checked us in and explained the area to us. Weather started to change and during the first serious birding attempts it started to rain. Nevertheless I found the first targets, including a flock of about 40 **Wrybills** (*Anarhynchus frontalis*, Scheefsnavelplevier) and two **New Zealand Dotterels** (*Charadrius obscurus*, Rosse Plevier), and met the first fellow birders, all from overseas.

24-11-2004: Morning is early this time of year. No time for jetlags. Around 5:30 I got up and checked the same area as the day before: The Hide, The Stilt Pond and Taramaire River Mouth. Sky was clear and despite the fact that species were the same, the sightings were much better. Good numbers of **Wrybills**, a few **New Zealand Dotterels** and lots of noisy **White-fronted Tern** (*Sterna striata*, Tara-stern) and **Black-billed Gull** (*Larus bulleri*, Zwartsnavelmeeuw). Both oystercatcher species were present and my first endemic warbler **Grey Gerygone** (*Gerygone igata*, Maori-mangrovezanger) showed. There were also two **Parasitic Jaegers** (*Stercorarius parasiticus*, Kleine Jager) chasing terns.

Just before noon we departed the centre and took the scenic coastal road to Auckland. We found yet another **New Zealand Dotterel** and a few new species for the trip including **Sacred Kingfisher** (*Todirhamphus sanctus*, Heilige IJsvogel), **Purple Swamphen/Pukeko** (*Porphyrio porphyrio*, Purperkoet) and the first **New Zealand Pigeon** (*Hemiphaga novaeseelandiae*, Nieuwzeelandse Duif). We skipped Auckland and drove on to Orewa where we had our second stay at the [Tui Song homestay](#) of Stuart en Allison Chambers (previously arranged, NZ \$ 75,- for an extremely comfortable en-suite room). After checking in Stuart was kind enough to show us around his area. This produced my only **New Zealand Grebes** (*Poliocephalus rufopectus*, Nieuwzeelandfuut), two couples at Strakers pond near Waiwera. Also present were **New Zealand Scaup** (*Aythya novaeseelandiae*, Nieuwzeelandse Toppereend) and **Grey Fantail** (*Rhipidura fuliginosa*, Grijsze Waaiersstaart). **Tuis** (*Prothemadera novaeseelandiae*, Toei) were common, including in the garden of Stuart and Allison.

25-11-2004: Our Tiritiri Matangi day started with bright sunny weather! We booked the ferry and the overnight stay prior to our trip. Ferries are run by [Fullers](#) and start in Auckland and Gulf Harbor, Manly (about 1 hour north of Auckland). From Manly the ferry ride is NZ \$ 80,- two way for two persons. The bunkhouse can be booked by [e-mail](#) and phone (+64-9-476 0010, see also the [Tiritiri Matangi website](#) NZ \$ 40,- for two dorm beds). On the boat we met the Finnish birder Antti Karppi again (met him before in Miranda) and we exchanged first experiences. The first new species was a fact before we set foot on the island: a **Saddleback** (*Philesturnus carunculatus*, Zadelrugspreeuw) loudly welcomed us. During the introduction speech the abundance of birds distracted us quite a bit and after leaving our luggage at the bunkhouse we were on our way. Started to walk the Ridge Road Track to the north side of the island and walked the East Coast

Track back, the latter being a wonderful scenic stroll. After that we learned the Wattle Track was actually the best track for birding but nevertheless we easily found most of the targets: **Stitchbird** (*Notiomystis cincta*, Geelbandhoningeter), **Takahe** (*Porphyrio mantelli*, Takahe), **New Zealand Robin** (*Petroica australis longipes*, Nieuwzeelandvliegenvanger) etc. **New Zealand Bellbird** (*Anthornis melanura*, Maori-belhoningvogel), **Red-fronted Parakeet** (*Cyanoramphus novaezelandiae*, Roodvoorhoofdkarakiri) and **Whitehead** (*Mohoua albicilla*, Popokatea) all proved common. After a bit of waiting the resident **Spotless Crake** (*Porzana tabuensis*, Pacifisch Porseleinhoen) and two **Brown Teals** (*Anas aucklandica*, Aucklandtaling) showed at the small pond beside the Wharf road.

The late afternoon produced **Little Penguin** (*Eudyptula minor*, Dwergpinguïn) in their nest boxes north of the wharf. Some **Fluttering Shearwaters** (*Puffinus gavia*, Vlinderpijlstormvogel) showed close enough to shore for identification. The evening excursion for **Little Spotted Kiwi** (*Apteryx owenii*, Kleine Grijze Kiwi) resulted in a few calling birds (both male and female) and a foraging Brown Teal that scared the hell out of me, but no kiwi visual.

26-11-2004: An early morning try for **Kokako** (*Callaeas cinerea*, Kokako) at the Wattle Track (where the track crosses the Wharf road) only resulted in one skulking bird after 1,5 hours of searching, pointed out to me by my wife (I was looking in the wrong direction). Upon arrival at the bunk house rumours spread that the boat was not coming today due to the windy conditions. And indeed we were stuck for another day. Weather was bad with strong winds indeed and heavy showers including hail! Every once in a while we tried to bird a bit. To kill time I joined a Dutch student ringing a young Robin. In the afternoon I spent my time seawatching. My first experience was impressive indeed, hundreds of **Fluttering Shearwaters**, twice as much **Australian Gannets** (*Morus serrator*, Pacifische Jan-van-gent), over 12 **Buller's Shearwater** (*Puffinus bulleri*, Bullers Pijlstormvogel) counted, (at least) 2 **Common Diving-Petrels** (*Pelecanoides urinatrix*, Alkstormvogeltje) and my first **Flesh-footed Shearwater** (*Puffinus carneipes*, Australische Grote Pijlstormvogel), great! In the evening again a few calling **Little Spotted Kiwis** but nothing to see. The second night was free of charge since we were not able to leave the island but we compensated that with an extra gift to the volunteers of the island.

27-11-2004: We were very happy to hear that the boat was coming today! The next day (28-11) we had an appointment with two American birders to go on a pelagic from Whitianga so time was running out. Our plans to go to Trounson Park for Brown Kiwi were ruined by the extra day on Tiritiri. Fortunately we were able to get the morning boat back to Gulf Harbour (after dropping over 90 new visitors - best not plan your trip in the weekend, it can get crowded) so we set foot on solid ground just after 11:00 o'clock. We immediately drove to Whitianga in the Coromandel Peninsula, with a bit of birding underway, but not much special. In Whitianga it was extremely difficult to find accommodation, apparently due to the fact that 3 couples were getting married the next day! We finally found the last free cabin in town at Mercury Bay Motor Camp (NZ \$ 45,-).

28-11-2004: In the morning weather looked well apart from some dark clouds that never reached us. We walked to Shakespeare's Lookout. Around the time we should board the boat for the pelagic to Red Mercury Island we met the American couple Michael and Merce who arranged the trip. But bad news, the captain considered the weather to be too rough to go out. It didn't seem that bad so we decided to find ourselves another boat. Luckily there are enough sport fishing boats around Whitianga and with the help of the Information officer we quickly found another boat for NZ \$ 400,-. We quickly bought some fish oil and fish parts and with an hour delay we departed, unfortunately with an inexperienced crew in terms of birding pelagics.

Within half an hour the first **Fluttering Shearwaters** started to turn up in numbers. I was extremely lucky to find a Hammerhead shark swimming right under our boat. The captain led us to a spot with not much birding activity around and after a bit of discussion we decided to go on to the 100 meter (depth?) mark but that cost us another NZ \$ 240,- in total. It was only at that 100 meter mark that the birds started to come. First to arrive and very numerous were **White-faced Storm-Petrels** (*Pelagodroma marina*, Bont Stormvogeltje) and **Common Diving-Petrels**. The rough sea (the first captain was right after all but it was not that bad, nobody got sick anyway) and the fact that none of us had much experience made it impossible to put names to all the birds. We birded at three spots around the 100 meter mark and close to Red Mercury Island until about 19:00 hours. We finally found a few **Black Petrels** (*Procellaria parkinsoni*, Zwarte Stormvogel), several **Great-winged/Grey-faced Petrels** (*Pterodroma macroptera*, Langvleugelstormvogel), one **Black-winged Petrel** (*Pterodroma nigripennis*, Zwartvleugelstormvogel), three **Little Shearwater** (*Puffinus assimilis haurakiensis*, Kleine Pijlstormvogel), good numbers of **Buller's Shearwater** and **Flesh-footed Shearwater** and several Pycroft/Cooks Petrels, based on the location most probably **Pycroft's Petrel** (*Pterodroma pycrofti*, Pycrofts Stormvogel), but what a drag to identify those to the species level! Around 20:00 o'clock we were back in the harbour again, tired but satisfied.

29-11-2004: We started early with the drive to Rotorua. Arrived there in the end of the morning and booked a cabin at the All Seasons Holiday Park (NZ \$ 48,- for a spacious cabin). The rest of the day was spent on sightseeing and visiting the impressive Wai-O-Tapu. The only interesting bird was a **(North Island) Tomtit** (*Petroica macrocephala toitoi*, Maori-vliegenvanger) at Wai-O-Tapu. It took me hours of mind-bending deciding on a route to see Pureora NP, have a fair chance to find Blue Duck and ending in Taupo all in one day!

30-11-2004: Started the day extremely early, 5:00 o'clock, to arrive at Pureora NP around daybreak (1,5 hour drive from Rotorua). **Kaka** (*Nestor meridionalis septentrionalis*, Kaka) was common and noisy around the watchtower and a **Long-tailed Koel** (*Eudynamis taitensis*, Langstaartkoel) was calling close to the tower but wouldn't show. A **Rifleman** (*Acanthisitta chloris granti*, Geweervogel) showed and **New Zealand Robin** and **Whitehead** were common. Best bird by far was a **New Zealand Falcon** (*Falco novaeseelandiae*, Nieuwzeelandse Valk) first flying by and later perched in a tree. For the sake of time we decided to leave the place around 9:00 o'clock without Yellow-fronted

Parakeet to have enough time to drive to the best Blue Duck spot: Ruatiti. We were happily surprised that the drive from Pureora to Ruatiti was only 2 hours.

At exact the 17 km spot (see **Central North Island** for details on this spot) we found the family **Blue Duck** (*Hymenolaimus malacorhynchus*, Blauwe Eend) with 2 chicks. Eventually it was only 1:30 pm when we were on our way back to Taupo. We drove past Tongariro NP, great area but lots of clouds and rain made it all a bit sad and the mountain didn't show. A try for Fernbird at the southern end of Lake Taupo failed, probably due to the strong winds. We checked in at Great Lake Holiday park (NZ \$ 40,- for a shared facility cabin) and called it a day.

1-12-2004: the day started sad with showers. No need to try for Fernbird in this weather. Two rainy visits to Hukka Falls and Craters of the Moon (nice!) and we were off to Napier, not for birds but for the town. Fortunately the weather improved significantly during the travel and in Napier it was a 25 °C again. A bird free afternoon in town. We slept at Kennedy Top 10 Holiday Park (NZ \$ 38,- for a cabin with shared facilities).

2-12-2004: We spent most of the morning driving from Napier (nice weather) to Wellington (rain, gale force winds). The rest of the day was used to see Wellington and to visit the National Museum Te Papa. After that we met the New Zealand based Canadian birder John Geale in his new house in the suburbs of Wellington. John generously offered us a diner and a place to sleep. At night a **Morepork** (*Ninox novaeseelandiae*, Boeboekuul) was calling in the garden.

3-12-2004: Time to make the step to South Island. The weather luckily was a lot better than yesterday with blue skies and only a fair bit of wind. We boarded the Wellington Picton Ferry Interislander (NZ \$ 280,- for the car and two adults, should be booked in advance, see the [Interislander site](#)). This ferry is a great opportunity to see seabirds. The harbour offered a few **Spotted Shags** (*Phalacrocorax punctatus*, Gevlekte Aalscholver). It took a while before the seabirds started to come. My first life albatross flew passed the boat.... unidentified. Luckily I found about 10 albatrosses of the Shy type, of which I could identify 4 as **New Zealand White-capped Albatross** (*Thalassarche cauta*, Witkapalbatros) and 1 **Salvin's Albatross** (*Thalassarche salvini*). At least 5 **Westland Petrels** (*Procellaria westlandica*, Westlandstormvogel) were close enough for identification. But the most impressive were not the Albatrosses but the huge numbers of prions in the Cook Strait. There must have been hundreds. Sometimes I counted 30 birds in one binoc sight. Some followed the boat pretty close. With my lack of experience I could only identify **Fairy Prion** (*Pachyptila turtur*, Duifprion) with certainty.

In Picton we had only just over an hour to get some food before boarding the boat for a Queen Charlotte Sound Trip. We went with [Dolphin Watch Ecotours](#), with a friendly, knowledgeable and fanatic crew. Even at the afternoon trip -where they don't visit the Rough-faced/King Shag colony- they can nearly guarantee one of these very rare shags. On board we met Brent Stephenson from [Wrybill Tours](#) with his two clients Ron Hoff and Dollyann Myers. The first **Rough-faced Shag** (*Phalacrocorax carunculatus*, Wrattenaalscholver) was found by the crew and that bird showed very well. We were treated with great views of 4 Hector's Dolpin (*Cephalorhynchus hectori*) and a bunch of Dusky Dolphins (*Lagenorhynchus obscurus*). This all in the best weather man can wish.

After that we drove on to Kaikoura (2 hours from Picton) where we checked in at the Dolphin Backpackers around 20:00 o'clock (NZ \$ 48,- for a double but not much fun).

4-12-2004: We booked an Albatross encounter with... [Oceanwings Albatross Encounter](#) (NZ \$ 60 p.p.). It was crowded at the centre but soon everyone went swimming with dolphins leaving only 4 participants to watch albatrosses. We boarded the ship and only after 10 minutes the first **Cape Petrels** (*Daption capense*, Kaapse Stormvogel) started following the boat. **Hutton's Shearwater** (*Puffinus huttoni*, Huttons Pijlstormvogel) was common close to shore. I was thrilled when the first albatross arrived, much closer than from the Wellington-Picton ferry! Then a second, third and within minutes we were followed by 10 albatrosses, all **Salvin's**, and the skipper just kept on going. At the first chumming spot we were surrounded by albatrosses, **Cape Petrels** and **Westland Petrels**. What a sight when the first 'big ones' started to arrive! At a certain time there were at least 5 **Wandering Albatrosses** (*Diomedea exulans*, Grote Albatross) and two **Northern Royal Albatross** (*Diomedea sanfordi*, Noordelijke Koningsalbatross) among the common **Salvin's** and **New Zealand White-capped Albatross** (*Thalassarche cauta*, Witkapalbatros). Unforgettable. Of course **Northern Giant-Petrel** (*Macronectes halli*, Noordelijke Reuzenstormvogel) was around too.

After this 2,5 hour trip we had a good lunch and decided to depart without a Whale excursion. We drove all the way to Fairlie, south of Christchurch. In Fairlie it rained like hell and it didn't stop during the night. We slept at Fairly Top Ten Holiday Park (NZ \$ 40,- good value but a bit chilly, unseasonably chilly to tell the truth!).

5-12-2004: Still raining in the morning. We departed to Lake Tekapo and we were quite surprised coming across a car with a thick layer of snow on the roof. Only a few kilometres further on up the road we were driving in a snow storm ourselves! The Church of the good Shepherd was somewhat different from the pictures we saw in the brochures! It snowed like crazy and the lake was hardly visible. My first try for Black Stilt was near Lake Alexandrina but without success, partly because of the snow storm. **Double-banded Plover** (*Charadrius bicinctus*, Dubbelbandplevier) was common. The second try was north of Lake Pukaki, behind the airstrip. It was not snowing but raining (probably a bit lower in altitude) making the visibility a bit better. The first **Black Stilt** (*Himantopus novaezelandiae*, Zwarte Steltkluut) was a juvenile (after a few obvious hybrids) and showed well from close quarters. There was another juvenile close by. Both birds were ringed. At least four adults were present much further up the river mouth with **White-headed Stilts** (*Himantopus leucocephalus*, Steltkluut) and some probable hybrids. Also present at this spot were **Black-fronted Tern** (*Sterna albobriata*, Nieuwzeelandse Stern), **Double-banded Plover** and **Wrybill**. Nice spot but the rain kind of ruined the fun to explore more of the area so we decided to leave directly.

We drove on to Omarama where we had a short (dry) stop at the bridge over the river with **Black-fronted Tern** obvious. After that we spent the best part of the morning driving to Oamaru at the coast south of Timaru. We found a nice cabin in Oamaru Top 10 Holiday Park (NZ \$ 40,-) and spent the afternoon walking on the beach. Here I found my first **Yellow-eyed Penguin** (*Megadyptes antipodes*, Geelooopinguin), a juvenile bird that sat just above the public beach and looked deserted by its parent. **Stewart Island Shag** (*Phalacrocorax chalconotus*, Stewart Island Aalscholver) flew by. I followed the trail

along the cliffs to the Yellow-eyed Penguin reservation just south of Oamaru and was surprised about its bad state - later I found out that this trail was closed for a while due to its bad and hazardous condition! While waiting for the penguins to arrive the seawatching was nice with lots of birds close to shore, including over 15 **Shy Albatrosses** spec. and a **Northern Giant Petrel**. Only one adult Yellow-eyed Penguin arrived before I gave up and headed back to the camping.

6-12-2004: In the morning we visited the Mouraki Boulders and drove on to Dunedin. First we checked in at Dunedin Holiday Park (NZ \$ 37,- for a cabin) and in the afternoon we visited the Royal Albatross colony at the Otago Peninsula. And indeed **Northern Royal Albatross** was present. We were treated with a show of a young bird arriving from sea and trying to land. It took him 5 tries before a final touch down; great to see from up close.

7-12-2004: In the morning we visited the chocolate factory in Dunedin (quite nice) and after that we hit the road again to the south. We drove straight to Bluff, not stopping in Invercargill, partly because the town was loaded with people because of a cattle show. Near Bluff we tried to find a good birding spot at the Awaroa Wetlands but the area was not as swampy as we expected it to be. Actually it looked quite ruined and except for the bay there was not much birding fun. Yet I had my first glimpse of a **Fernbird** (*Megalurus punctatus*, Varengrasvogel) at the far end of the road along the Awarua Bay. We found a peculiar and rather worn down hotel in Bluff, Bay View Hotel (NZ\$ 60,- including breakfast - being nothing at all), with a room directly above the noisy bar, but the hotel was practically situated directly opposite the ferry terminal.

8-12-2004: While boarding the [ferry](#) we met the German birder Christian Dieter and his girlfriend. Together we tried to make something out of the rough weather while going to Stewart Island. And rough it was, half the boat was sick and it didn't result in spectacular seabirds. We arrived in Oban just before noon where we first checked in at the (prior arranged) Shearwater Inn/Stewart Island Backpackers (NZ \$ 60,- a night for a small room) and after that we contacted Phillip Smith (phone: 03 2191144) for the Kiwi excursion. But Phillip had bad news: slim chance that the excursion could go on because the gale force winds wouldn't allow for a drop off at the beach on the other side of the island. After this deception Christian and I decided to ignore the bad weather and pay a visit to Ulva Island, the major bird attraction of Stewart Island. The strong wind topped off most bird activity but we found some good ones anyway: **Weka** (*Gallirallus australis scotti*, Weka), **Pipipi/Brown Warbler** (*Mohoua novaeseelandiae*, Finschia) and **Yellowhead** (*Mohoua ochrocephala*, Mohua) and we even were able to keep it dry.

In the evening we had the final word on the Kiwi excursion: it was a no-go. To make some use of our time we walked up to Ackers Point (about 4 km walk from Oban) and watched the seabirds while waiting for the dark to have a change for Kiwi that has been reported around Ackers Point. Great to see was the only **Buller's Albatross** (*Thalassarche bulleri*, Bullers Albatross) of the trip among the more common **NZ Shy** and **Salvins Albatrosses**. At night the spooky sound of the **Sooty Shearwater** (*Puffinus griseus*, Grauwe Pijlstormvogel) arriving at their breeding sites around the Point was nice but not a single Kiwi to be heard, let alone see. And of course it rained and we got wet but what else is new...

9-12-2004: In the morning we visited Ulva Island again, the same birds but a bit more activity. The skipper of the water taxi told us that a new low with gale force winds was coming to Stewart Island. We called Phillip again and again the chances were not good. With the chance of being stuck on an island all over again we decided to pack and leave the island while we still could. We took the afternoon boat back to the mainland.

The weather on the mainland was even worse than on Stewart Island with showers during the whole trip to Te Anau, Fjordlands. We arrived in Te Anau around 18:00 o'clock and checked in at Fjordlands Holiday Park (NZ 40,- for a cabin). The weather was good in Te Anau and we heard that it had been good for an exceptional 4 days in a row (until we arrived...).

10-12-2004: We had already arranged a Doubtful Sound excursion for the 11th so this day was spent near Milford Sound. We first drove up to Milford Sound where we saw our first **Kea** (*Nestor notabilis*, Kea). After that we drove back to the Homer Pass for Rock Wren. It was raining again but better weather seemed underway. It took Maaike only one stroll to locate the first Rock Wren but where was I? Back at the car dipping it... We went back to the spot together confident in finding it back easily. But after half an hour I started to doubt that confidence and after one hour I stood alone in the rain doubting the chance of seeing one at all. After about two hours a large group of Birdquest birders arrived guided by a local forester who had a trick or two to lure the bird in. I took the liberty of looking over the shoulders of these paying costumers and witnessed the success of the guide's polystyrene-and-bottle trick: a **Rock Wren** (*Xenicus gilviventris*, Rotswinterkoning) came flying towards the group and showed very well to all the birders, including me, pfff they really saved my holiday . That took most of the morning and we did another small bit of birding and sightseeing before we headed back to the cabin.

11-12-2004: This day was completely arranged for us by [Real Journeys](#) (NZ \$ 410,- for two persons) so we only had to turn up at the right spot and let us float. The first part of the trip was nothing in terms of birds, it started at the Doubtful Sound with the first pair of **Fjordland Crested Penguin** (*Eudyptes pachyrhynchus*, Fjordland Kuifpinguin) already before I had my binocs ready. Later on I found another two swimming and the skipper found two nice ones sitting on a rock near the entrance to sea. Nice also were the huge group of over 60 Bottlenose Dolphins (*Tursiops truncatus*) including young.

12-12-2004: We had an early start from Te Anau to arrive before 9:00 o'clock in Glenorchie, north of Queenstown. Maaike did a horseback ride and I had a last chance to find Yellow-fronted Parakeet. I went to Lake Sylvan where I found **Yellow-fronted Parakeet** (*Cyanoramphus auriceps*, Geelvoorhoordkarakiri) relatively easy close to the Lake Sylvan trail turn of from the Rootburn trail road. I walked the Lake Sylvan trail for a moment but no Yellowheads around. **Pipipi** and **New Zealand (South Island) Robin** were common and I found one **Rifleman**.

After lunch we went on to drive the first part to the north. The drive up to Haast took us the whole afternoon and in the evening we checked in at Wilderness Backpackers in Haast (NZ \$ 55,- for a room). **Keas** flew over in the evening.

13-12-2004: From Haast we drove up the very scenic west coast to Fox Glacier where we had a moment to check out the glacier. The clouds didn't allow us to see the mountains so Lake Matheson was no good at all in reflecting Mount Cook. We skipped the Franz Josef Glacier and drove on to Greymouth and further on to Punakaiki. We paid the Pancake Rocks a quick visit and found a nicely situated guesthouse (Te Nikau Retreat, NZ \$ 55,-, 3 km north of Punakaiki town).

The night was spent at Bullock's Creek, a known spot for Great Spotted Kiwi. Unfortunately it started raining again but I tried anyway, hoping that the water in the creek wouldn't rise too fast floating the only road out of the area. I eventually heard both male and female **Great Spotted Kiwi** (*Apteryx haastii*, Grote Grijze Kiwi) but they called from within the woods and it is impossible to get into there since the area is filled with potholes. Actually the chances of seeing a Kiwi here are slim as most of the trails are noisy and penetrating the forest is no option.

14-12-2004: After a second visit to Bullock's creek to see the area during daylight, we hit the road again, back to Kaikoura for a second albatross experience. The drive took us most of the day with no relevant birds. In Kaikoura we checked in for an Albatross encounter in the morning and a whale watch trip around noon.

15-12-2004: This morning albatross excursion was just as impressive as the first and it also resulted in new species: a **Black-browed Albatross** (*Thalassarche melanophris*, Wenkbrouwalbatross) passing by, a **White-chinned Petrel** (*Procellaria aequinoctialis*, Witkinstormvogel) and a **Southern Giant-Petrel** (*Macronectes giganteus*, Zuidelijke Reuzenstormvogel) fighting for food with Northerns.

Almost immediately after this trip we went on the [whale watch excursion](#). Quite nice but also a lot ado about a few whales. They can pretty much guarantee whales which is good but the show around it was not my thing. The rest of the day we spent reading and doing nothing which is a good thing to do after using Sealegs.

16-12-2004: Things are getting to an end in New Zealand. We drove from Kaikoura to Christchurch with a short stop at St Anna's Lagoon, producing the common duck species and two **Cape Barren Geese** (*Cereopsis novaehollandiae*, Hoendergans) that are apparently introduced in New Zealand.

Finding the endemics and other targets

Most of the following is based on my own experience and things I learned while preparing the trip and on the way. This list and the mentioned spots are by no means complete but I tried to give some of the most productive spots. To have a more complete picture you can use Chambers Locality guide (see **Books and maps**) or the soon to be published new where to watch birds book (you best mail Brent Stephenson (brent@wrybill-tours.com) for the most recent update on when this book is available).

Birds with an * are endemic species, birds with a ^b are endemic breeding species. Birds without Latin and Dutch names were not seen by me but are added to be a bit more complete. Introduced species (by human) are excluded.

***Brown Kiwi**: Best spots on North Island are Aroha Island in the Bay of Islands and Trounson Park, also in the north. On Stewart Island the Brown Kiwi is almost guaranteed when joining a kiwi trip with Phillip Smith (03 219 1144). The South Island birds are more difficult but I have no experience with them.

***Little Spotted Kiwi** (*Apteryx owenii*, Kleine Grijsze Kiwi - Vulnerable): The most accessible option is Tiritiri Matangi where it is relatively common and can be heard and sometimes seen during the night. Also possible on Kapiti Island.

***Great Spotted Kiwi** (*Apteryx haastii*, Grote Grijsze Kiwi - Vulnerable): there are two accessible spots, both on South Island, north of Greymouth. I tried my luck at Bullocks Creek, just north of Punakaiki, driving to the end of the track (6 km) and walking from there into the forest. In my impression it is rather difficult to actually see a bird here since it is impossible to penetrate the forest (potholes) and the tracks are noisy due to pebbles. The second spot is at the Heaphy Track north of Karamea but I don't have more details.

^b**Fiordland Crested Penguin** (*Eudyptes pachyrhynchus*, Fjordland Kuifpinguin - Vulnerable): In spring easily encountered during a commercial trip in one of the Sounds in Fjordlands. Also possible on Stewart Island.

^b**Yellow-eyed Penguin** (*Megadyptes antipodes*, Geelooepinguin - Endangered): Easily found on several known locations along the south east coast of South Island, for example just south of Oamaru. Excursions to breeding sites are organised on the Otago peninsula near Dunedin.

***New Zealand Grebe** (*Poliiocephalus rufopectus*, Nieuwzeelandfuut - Vulnerable): Only found on North Island. We found four birds at Strakers Pond near Waiwera (north of Auckland) but they should be possible in the larger lakes in the centre of North Island, for example the south of Lake Taupo is a good spot.

Albatrosses (Diomedea, Thalassarche): albatrosses are guaranteed on almost any trip to New Zealand, even if you're not that happy with boats. Especially at coastal spots on the south eastern parts of South Island and on Stewart Island they can be seen (and identified) from ashore. But best thing to do is an excursion with [Kaikoura Albatross Encounter](#) in Kaikoura. Also the ferries Wellington-Picton and to Stewart Island are good for albatrosses. The **Northern Royal Albatross** (*Diomedea sanfordi*, Noordelijke Koningsalbatross - Endangered) colony on the Otago peninsula near Dunedin is worth a visit.

^b**Black Petrel** (*Procellaria parkinsoni*, Zwarte Stormvogel - Vulnerable): Normally only encountered on a pelagic in the Auckland region. We saw a few at our Whitianga pelagic and they are also seen on Hauraki Gulf pelagics.

^b**Westland Petrel** (*Procellaria westlandica*, Westlandstormvogel - Vulnerable): nearly guaranteed on a Kaikoura pelagic, also possible from the Wellington-Picton ferry. The breeding colonies around Punakaiki can be visited.

Cooks Petrel/^b**Pycrofts Petrel**: hard to separate! Best bet is to join a Hauraki Gulf pelagic (Auckland) with a professional group like [Pterodroma Pelagics](#). Both species can be seen on Hauraki Gulf pelagics. Best option for Pycroft is to arrange a pelagic from Whitianga to Red Mercury Island where they breed. Cooks can also be seen on a Stewart Island pelagic.

^b**Buller's Shearwater** (*Puffinus bulleri*, Bullers Pijlstormvogel - Vulnerable): fairly common, especially on pelagics around Auckland (Hauraki Gulf or Whitianga), also seen from Tiritiri Matangi during a storm. Can also be seen from Kaikoura pelagics.

^b**Fluttering Shearwater** (*Puffinus gavia*, Vlinderpijlstormvogel): by far the most common seabird of our trip. Seen in numbers on several pelagics and also from the coast. Hard to miss.

^b**Hutton's Shearwater** (*Puffinus huttoni*, Huttons Pijlstormvogel - Endangered): best place is a Kaikoura pelagic where it is almost guaranteed.

***Rough-faced (King) Shag** (*Phalacrocorax carunculatus*, Wrattenaalscholver - Vulnerable): the only option is to arrange a trip into the Queen Charlotte Sound (South Island). We had a great afternoon trip with [Dolphin Watch Ecotours](#).

***Bronzed/Stewart Island Shag** (*Phalacrocorax chalconotus*, Stewart Island Aalscholver - Vulnerable): easily found on coastal locations from Oamaru southward and on Stewart Island.

***Spotted Shag** (*Phalacrocorax punctatus*, Gevlekte Aalscholver): very common on coastal South Island, can also be found on North Island.

***Brown Teal** (*Anas aucklandica*, Aucklandtaling - Vulnerable): best place to find this species is on Tiritiri Matangi (reintroduced) when staying overnight. Also on some coastal locations north of Auckland.

***New Zealand Scaup** (*Aythya novaeseelandiae*, Nieuwzeelandse Toppereend): fairly common diving duck, found easily on the big North Island lakes like Lake Taupo. Also on lakes in the highlands of South Island.

***Blue Duck** (*Hymenolaimus malacorhynchus*, Blauwe Eend - Vulnerable): probably the most accessible spot is in the Ruatiti domain, south west of Taupo. Follow highway number 4 and turn into the Ruatiti road just north of Raetihi and south of Tohunga Junction. Follow this road for 17 km. Here the road crosses the river. We saw a family from this bridge. The river back for about 4 km should also be good. Other options are rivers in the Tongariro NP area south of Taupo and on South Island they are seen along rivers in the Fjordlands area (for example along the Milford Sound road after passing the Homer Tunnel).

***Paradise Shelduck** (*Tadorna variegata*, Paradijscasarca): very common all over both islands, mostly couples but sometimes in good numbers.

***New Zealand Falcon** (*Falco novaeseelandiae*, Nieuwzeelandse Valk - Near threatened): difficult to find on North Island, where the greater Pureora area is a good spot. More easily seen on South Island, for example in the Highlands near Mount Cook and near Glenorchie/Queenstown.

***Weka** (*Gallirallus australis*, Weka - Vulnerable): there are several spots to find this bird. Ulva Island (Stewart Island) is probably the only one that pretty much guarantees finding it. Also in Fjordlands and along the northern part of the west coast of South Island. On North Island it can be seen on Kawau Island in the Hauraki Gulf, even without entering the island (from a boat).

***Takahe** (*Porphyrio mantelli*, Takahe - Endangered): the only relevant option to find Takahe is to visit Tiritiri Matangi or Kapiti Island, both North Island. On Tiri it is easy to find.

Spotless Crake (*Porzana tabuensis*, Pacifisch Porseleinhoen): not an endemic, yet often a target anyway. We found a bird in the small pool along the Wharf road on Tiritiri Matangi.

South Island Oystercatcher** (*Haematopus finschi*, Nieuwzeelandse Bonte Scholekster)/Variable Oystercatcher** (*Haematopus unicolor*, Nieuwzeelandse Zwarte Scholekster): both oystercatchers are easily found, Variable mostly in coastal areas and S.I. also inland, but they do occur together.

***Black Stilt** (*Himantopus novaeseelandiae*, Zwarte Steltkluut - Critical): Black Stilts only breed in the highlands in central South Island, mostly around Twizel. During the non-breeding season they can be found in other areas. Best option is north of Lake Pukaki (north of Twizel), behind the Glentanner Park Scenic Flights airfield. In this delta post breeding birds congregate. Be aware that also hybrids are around. This spot is also good for Black-fronted Tern, Wrybill and Double-banded Plover.

***Wrybill** (*Anarhynchus frontalis*, Scheefsnavelplevier - Vulnerable): not uncommon in their breeding area: the large rivers in the centre of South Island. I found several while searching for Black Stilt north of Lake Pukaki. There was also a good flock of about 40 birds present at Miranda (Taramaire River Mouth).

***Double-banded Plover** (*Charadrius bicinctus*, Dubbelbandplevier): common on South Island along rivers as well as on beaches. A bit harder to find on North Island (we didn't see them on North Island).

***New Zealand Dotterel** (*Charadrius obscurus*, Rosse Plevier - Vulnerable): only found on North Island. Miranda is probably the best spot to find this bird. They breed near "The Hide". They can also be found north of Auckland. The Stewart Island population is hard to find during breeding season.

Shore Plover: this extremely rare bird is apart from the Chatham Island group only possible on a small islet, called the Beehive in the Hauraki Gulf. At present there is only one (!) bird present so check the most recent information! Pelagics in the Hauraki Gulf mostly visit Beehive to tick this species.

***Black-billed Gull** (*Larus bulleri*, Zwartsnavelmeeuw - Vulnerable): a big colony of this species breeds near "The Hide" in Miranda. Black-billed Gulls are also easy to find on South Island where they are the most common gulls inland.

***Black-fronted Tern** (*Sterna albobriata*, Nieuwzeelandse Sterm - Endangered): Black-fronted Terns are best to be found in the fast riverbeds in the centre of South Island. The river mouth north of Lake Pukaki is very good as is the bridge over the river just north of Omarama, south of Twizel. But they can be found in other spots too, mostly on South Island.

***New Zealand Pigeon** (*Hemiphaga novaeseelandiae*, Nieuwzeelandse Duif - Near threatened): still relatively easy to find in most major forests in New Zealand. Islands like Tiritiri Matangi and Stewart Island are great spots to find them, but they normally won't elude a travelling birder.

***Yellow-fronted Parakeet** (*Cyanoramphus auriceps*, Geelvoorhoedkarakiri - Near threatened): the best spot on North Island to find them is Pureora Forest, though we didn't get them there. On South Island you can look for them in the mountains. The area around the Lake Silvan Trail (north of Glenorchy/Queenstown) is a reliable spot. They can be found on Ulva Island (Stewart Island) but they can be hard there.

Red-fronted Parakeet (*Cyanoramphus novaezelandiae*, Roodvoorhoofd-karakiri): very common on Tiritiri Matangi (reintroduced) and probable on other spots on the mainland too. Ulva Island (Stewart Island) is also a good spot to find them.

***New Zealand Kaka** (*Nestor meridionalis*, Kaka - Vulnerable): luckily these beautiful parrots are noisy enough to attract attention. We found them on several spots. The North Island form can easily be found in Pureora Forest, around the watchtower. The South Island form is common on Stewart Island and is also present in the mountain forests of South Island.

***Kea** (*Nestor notabilis*, Kea - Vulnerable): the most famous spot for Kea is the Homer Tunnel on the way to Milford Sound. Here they climb tourist cars for fun and can do serious damage to those cars. They also can be found near the restaurant in Milford Sound and we heard them on other locations like in Haast and at the Fox Glacier.

Kakapo: once on the brink of extinction this bird is now recovering well with a total of (exactly) 86 birds. This bird is still about impossible to twitch. To visit their breeding island you should sign in for a voluntary job for at least 2 weeks and then wait for about two years before it's your turn! See the [Kakapo recovery programme](#) for more info.

^b**Long-tailed Koel** (*Eudynamis taitensis*, Langstaartkoel): a difficult bird to get the eyes on. We only heard two different birds at Pureora Forest, both didn't want to show. They can be found all over New Zealand in the good season (summer).

***Rifleman** (*Acanthisitta chloris*, Geweervogel): should be possible in most forests on both North and South Island. We found a North Island bird in Pureora Forest (seen from the watchtower) and South Island birds on Ulva Island and at the Lake Silvian Trail.

***Rock Wren** (*Xenicus gilviventris*, Rotswinterkoning - Near threatened): best accessible site still is the Homer Tunnel on the way to Milford Sound. The birds are found along the nature trail that starts at the car park, but they can be hard to find without means to lure them in. A way to lure them is with making squeaking sounds with polystyrene on glass.

***New Zealand Fernbird** (*Megalurus punctatus*, Varengrasvogel): for me this was one of the hardest birds to get, most probably due to the bad weather with strong winds. There are a lot of spots where this bird can be found. Among the best are the southern part of Lake Taupo (North Island) and on South Island Sinclair Wetlands south of Dunedin (South Island).

***New Zealand Robin** (*Petroica australis*, Nieuwzeelandvliegenvanger): to some extent easily found in most native forests. Be aware that the forms of North and South Island may be split in the future. The North Island form is common on Tiritiri Matangi (introduced) and also in Pureora Forest. The South Island form is common around the Fjordlands (e.g. in Milford Sound). The Stewart Island form is common on Ulva Island.

***Tomtit** (*Petroica macrocephala*, Maori-vliegenvanger): this charming little bird is relatively common in native vegetation. It has only recently been introduced to Tiritiri Matangi where it is hard to find, but while travelling both North and South Island you should come across a few. Also this one might be split into a South Island and a North Island species.

***Grey Gerygone** (*Gerygone igata*, Maori-mangrovezanger): one of the most common endemics, found nearly everywhere.

***Whitehead** (*Mohoua albicilla*, Popokatea): another charming warbler, found only on North Island. Common on Tiritiri Matangi (reintroduced) and also found in Pureora Forest. Probably still present in most of the North Island native forests.

***Pipipi/Brown Creeper** (*Mohoua novaeseelandiae*, Finschia): only found on South and Stewart Island. On Ulva Island (Stewart Island) it is common and easy to find. Might be more difficult on South Island but I found several (by their call) on the Lake Silvian Trail and also on the way to Milford Sound.

***Yellowhead** (*Mohoua ochrocephala*, Mohua - Vulnerable): a tricky bird to find. Possible on Ulva Island (Stewart Island, reintroduced) but hard to find on mainland South Island where it is rapidly declining. Lake Silvian Trail, close to Lake Silvian appears to be a good spot.

***New Zealand Bellbird** (*Anthornis melanura*, Maori-belhoningvogel): still fairly common and easily found on both islands. For example very common on Tiritiri Matangi.

***Stitchbird** (*Notiomystis cincta*, Geelbandhoningeter - Vulnerable): fairly common on Tiritiri Matangi and also Kapiti Island but extinct on the mainland.

***Tui** (*Prothemadera novaeseelandiae*, Toei): very common almost all over its range. Easily found on Tiritiri Matangi and Stewart Island.

***Kokako** (*Callaeas cinerea*, Kokako - Endangered): one of the greatest birds and target to all birdwatchers this one can be hard to find. It is found on Tiritiri Matangi (introduced), along the Wattle track, where it crosses the Wattle Road. Also a chance in Pureora Forest but you need up to date information on the best spot to find them. Another good spot seems to be Boundary Stream Mainland Island, between Wairoa and Napier in the Hawke's Bay region.

***Saddleback** (*Philesturnus carunculatus*, Zadelrugspreeuw - Near threatened): this beautiful and noisy bird is easy on Tiritiri Matangi where it is hard to miss. Also found on Kapiti Island, Motuaro Island (in the Queen Charlotte Sound) and Ulva Island (Stewart Island).

Site information

Numbers:

- V few: between 1 and 10
- X several: between 10 and about 50
- XX lots of: between 50 and 100
- C abundant: over 100
- CC highly abundant: several hundreds
- M Exceptionally abundant: huge flocks, around and over 1000
- MM unimaginable abundant: tens of thousands

Miranda Shorebird Centre

Location: The Miranda Shorebird Centre is located along the Firth Of Thames, about 1.5 hours south east of Auckland (North Island). Miranda Shorebird Centre is 2-3 km north of the (tiny) town of Miranda on the west side of the Firth Of Thames. Best birding spots are near and on the way to "The Hide" and at the Tamaire River Mouth, reachable by car (first turn right after a bridge into a unpaved path, when coming from the Shorebird centre).

Costs: Birding is free of charge. Accommodation in the centre was (NZ \$ 50,-) for a two person room including kitchen.

Date(s): 23 and 24-11-2004

Notes: Miranda is one of the nicest shorebird areas on North Island, with coastal marshes, lagoons, mangroves and mudflats. Best time to visit during winter or spring with the highest numbers of migratory waders around. Best time to bird is around high tide, though New Zealand Dotterel can be found anytime.

Highlights: New Zealand Grebe (4 - not seen in Miranda but at Strakers Pond in Waiwera (north of Auckland)), Australian Shoveler (2), New Zealand Scaup (V - also at Strakers Pond in Waiwera), South Island Oystercatcher (X), Variable Oystercatcher (V), **Wrybill** (40), **New Zealand Dotterel** (5), Black-billed Gull (XX)

Tiritiri Matangi

Location: This small island is situated in the Hauraki Gulf north of Auckland and can be reached by [Fullers](#) ferry from Auckland and Gulf Harbour. Gulf Harbour is in Manly, about 1,5 hours drive north of Auckland. It is possible to do daytrips and overnight stays are accommodated by the supporters of Tiritiri Matangi Inc (see their [website](#)).

Map (taken from the [Supporters of Tiritiri Matangi](#) website):



Costs: the ferry is NZ \$ 80,- return for two persons. Entrance to the island is free of charge. Guided walks can best be booked in advance and are very cheap. The bunkhouse costs NZ \$ 40,- for two dorm beds.

Date(s): 25 and 26-11-2004

Notes: Visiting Tiri is a must.. It is a beautiful island and supports some of the rarest birds in the world. The volunteers do a great job in restoring the forest and maintaining the great tracks. The Wattle Track is the best for birds, especially Kokako but it is advised to check out the whole island, including the east coast. To have a change in finding Little Spotted Kiwi and Brown Teal it is best to stay overnight.

Highlights: Little Spotted Kiwi (V - heard only), Buller's Shearwater (12), Brown Teal (3), Takahe (V), Red-fronted Parakeet (XX), Whitehead (XX), Stitchbird (XX), Kokako (1), Saddleback (XX)

Whitianga pelagic

Location: Whitianga is located on the eastern shores of the Coromandel Peninsula. Allow enough time to get there because the roads are winding and rather slow. The town is approximately three to four hours drive from Auckland. To enjoy the seabirds it is essential to get out in the open sea far enough. We held the '100 meter line' as a target (we read about that in some e-mail), which is a bit further than Red Mercury Island and approximately 2 hours with a fast boat.

Costs: We paid a total of NZ \$ 400,- for the initial boat trip and had to pay another NZ \$ 240,- to get to the 100 meter line which was further out to sea than the captain expected.

Date(s): 28-11-2004

Notes: The entire trip took from 14:30 till 20:00. Afternoon is best for finding Pycrofts Petrel flying back to their burrows on Red Mercury Island. The presence of good birds only started at approaching the 100 meter line, showing that, under our conditions (high off shore winds), you best get out as far as possible. The captain promised us that 'petrels' can already be seen in the bay but those are all Fluttering Shearwaters!

Highlights: Little Penguin (1), **Black Petrel** (3), Grey-faced Petrel (V), **Black-winged Petrel** (1), **Pycroft Petrel** (at least some of the Pycroft/Cooks Petrels present must have been Pycroft), Little Shearwater (3), Buller's Shearwater (V), Flesh-footed Shearwater (V), White-faced Storm-Petrel (C), Common Diving Petrel (XX).

Central North Island

Location: Our main purpose to visit these parts of North Island was tourist things like visiting the geothermic parks around Rotorua. We held one big birding trip to Pureora Forest and the Ruatiti domain. Pureora Forest can best be visited from highway 30, Pureora Forest is signposted on the south side of this road. The watchtower is easily found from here. In the morning it is just about 2 hours drive from Rotorua. We visited the Ruatiti domain specific for Blue Duck. The Ruatiti domain can be found along highway 4 (Hamilton - Wanganui). The junction is south of National Park, halfway between Tohunga Junction and Raetihi. Ruatiti is signposted. The best spot for Blue Duck can be found by driving exactly 17 km along this winding road into the valley and stopping at the bridge at 17 km. The river can be scanned from the bridge. Other spots along this river can also be productive. It took us about 3 hours from Pureora to the Blue Duck spot.

Costs: -

Date(s): 30-11-2004

Notes: This day was quite a drive, starting in Rotorua early enough to arrive in Rotorua at dawn, continuing to Ruatiti and back to Taupo. But it is possible in a day with enough time for stopovers to find birds and enjoy the marvellous landscapes (highway 47 from National Park to Turangi is just great!). At the end of the day we did a few extra stopovers near Turangi and the southern shores of Lake Taupo but there was too much

wind to find birds. The southern shores of Lake Taupo can be productive under better circumstances (for example for Fernbird).

Highlights: New Zealand Scaup (V), **Blue Duck** (4, two adults and two charming chicks in Ruatiti), **New Zealand Falcon** (1 Pureora), Kaka (V Pureora), **Long-tailed Koel** (2 heard only), Rifleman (1 Pureora), Whitehead (V)

Queen Charlotte Sound

Location: QCS is in the northern tip of South Island in the Marlborough Sounds Maritime Park. Entrance to the northern parts, where King Shag can be found is only by boat. We used the service of [Dolphin Watch Ecotours](#), with their departure dock in Picton. Allow at least 4 hours to drive to Picton from Christchurch.

Costs: The excursion into the sound was NZ \$ 88,- per person for an afternoon excursion, starting at 13:30 and ending around 18:00.

Date(s): 03-12-2004

Notes: The guides from Dolphin Watch Ecotours are well trained in spotting birds and dolphins and very friendly. It is not completely guaranteed to find King Shag on an afternoon trip, because there is not enough time to go to the breeding rock. But there is a fair chance anyway and this way it can be combined with the morning ferry (9:00 departure) from Wellington. The ferry was also very productive due to good winds.

Highlights (including the Wellington - Picton ferry): New Zealand White-headed Albatross (V Wellington - Picton), Fairy Prion (CC - Wellington - Picton), Westland Petrel (V Wellington - Picton), **King Shag** (3), New Zealand (South Island) Robin (1 Motuara Island), Hector's Dolphin, Dusky Dolphin

Kaikoura

Location: Kaikoura is a relatively small but thriving town about 2 hours (180 km) north of Christchurch.

Costs: We paid NZ \$ 120,- for two persons on the Albatross excursion (a minimum of two), but prices have changed since. You best check [Kaikoura Albatross Encounter](#) for recent prices. Trips take about 2,5 hours. The Whalewatch excursions are significant more expensive: NZ \$ 240,- for two persons.

Date(s): 04-12-2004 and 15-12-2004

Notes: It is highly advised to do at least two different albatross trips, preferably on different times of day. I did both trips at the same time of day (9:00) but got different birds anyway. It was surprising to see that the whalewatch excursion (afternoon) had some birds that I didn't see during the albatross excursions, probably because the whalewatchers go a bit further out at sea.

Highlights: Antipodean Albatross (4 and 5), Wandering (Gibsons) Albatross (3 and 2), Northern Royal Albatross (2 and 1), Black-browed Albatross (1 only on the second trip), New Zealand White-headed Albatross (at least 2), Salvin's Albatross (XX), Southern Giant Petrel (1 only on the second trip), Northern Giant Petrel (V), White-chinned Petrel (1 only on the second trip), Westland Petrel (X), **Hutton's Shearwater** (XX)

South Island Highlands

Location: This area is not known by that name but I feel free to do it anyway. I mean the region where Black Stilt can be found, globally between Omarama in the south, Mount Cook in the north and Fairlie in the east and Twizel in the centre. The area is about 250 km (three hours at least) from Christchurch. In this chapter I also included the coastal area of Oamaru, about 1,5 hour drive north of Dunedin, and the Otago peninsula direct east of Dunedin (1/2 hour drive).

Costs: NZ \$ 50,- for a guided tour to the albatross colony of the Otago peninsula.

Date(s): 05-12-2004

Notes: This is one of the most scenic areas of New Zealand, yet we left as quick as we got there, due to the bad weather, including snow blizzards. If possible, allow more time to explore the area. By far the best bet to find Black Stilts is the northern part of Lake Pukaki, behind the small airfield in Glentanner. You can park the car behind the airfield, pass the gate and walk on to the lake with the airstrip on your right. The Stilts can be very far away so take a scope.

Highlights: **Yellow-eyed Penguin** (2 Oamaru), Stewart Island Shag (XX), **Black Stilt** (2 juv and 4 ad Lake Pukaki), Wrybill (V Lake Pukaki), Double-banded Plover (XX Lake Pukaki and Lake Tekapo), Black-billed Gull (XX), **Black-fronted Tern** (XX)

Stewart Island

Location: Stewart Island is the southern most 'real' island. It can be reached by plane and by boat from Bluff. Bluff is about 3 hours drive from Dunedin, the boat takes another hour to get to Oban.

Costs: NZ \$ 45,- p.p. one way for the boat.

Date(s): 08 and 09-12-2004

Notes: In terms of birding Stewart Island is not a must, but it is the best spot to actually see a Kiwi (we were not that lucky). Apart from that the small Ulva Island has good birding to offer and is one of the best places to find Weka and Yellowhead (reintroduced). Ulva Island can be reached by water taxi.

Highlights: **Buller's Albatross** (1 seen from Ackers Point, about 4 km walk from Oban), Weka (6 Ulva Island), Red-fronted Parakeet (X Ulva Island), New Zealand Kaka (X),

Rifleman (3 Ulva Island), **New Zealand Fernbird** (2 Awarua wetlands near Bluff), **Pipipi** (V Ulva Island), **Yellowhead** (1 Ulva Island), Saddleback (V Ulva Island)

Fjordlands and the westcoast

Location: Entrance to the Fjordland area is by the town of Te Anau about 4 hours drive from Dunedin. From here you can drive into Milford Sound (with the famous Rock Wren spot at the Homer Tunnel) and to Manapouri (where boats into Doubtful Sound depart). In this chapter I also included our short visit to Glenorchie and the Punakaki area (west coast) where we also did a bit of birding. Glenorchie is one of the greatest areas we visited, about 1 hour drive west of Queenstown. Punakaki is about 1 hour north of Greymouth which is another 4.5 hours drive west of Christchurch.

Costs: NZ \$ 410,- for a two person daytrip into Doubtful Sound (excluding lunch)

Date(s): 10-12-2004 (Milford Sound), 11-12-2004 (Doubtful Sound), 12-12-2004 (Glenorchie), 13-12-2004 (Punakaki)

Notes: The best spot to find Rock Wren must be at the Homer Tunnel, on the way to Milford Sound. The short nature trail is easy to find at the carpark east of the tunnel. Realise that this bird is by far not guaranteed, especially if you don't have means to call it in. This area is also good for Kea. Both Milford and Doubtful Sound are good for Fjordland Crested Penguin. We visited the Glenorchie area to find Yellow-fronted Parakeet (see the **endemics** section). In Punakaiki I birded the Bullock's Creek just north of town for Greater Spotted Kiwi.

Highlights: **Greater Spotted Kiwi** (2 heard only at Bullocks Creek), **Fjordland Crested Penguin** (5 Doubtful Sound), New Zealand Falcon (2 Glenorchie), Weka (1 Doubtful Sound, 1 Bullocks Creek), Yellow-fronted Parakeet (3 Glenorchie), Kea (6 Milford Sound, V Haast), Rifleman (1 Glenorchie), Rock Wren (2 one by my wife, one by me at the Homer Tunnel), New Zealand Fernbird (2 heard only somewhere between Haast and Fox Glacier), Pipipi (V Fjordlands, V Glenorchie)