

THE SUBANTARCTIC ISLANDS OF NEW ZEALAND & AUSTRALIA

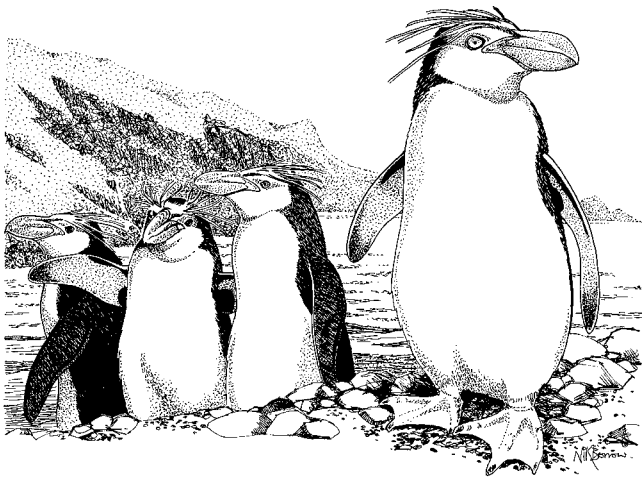
The Ultimate 'Down Under' Birding Expedition

Monday 31st October – Friday 18th November 2011 (19 days)

Leaders: Hannu Jännes and Heritage Expeditions staff

Group Size Limit: 20 or more

Tour Category: Easy (although there are some optional Moderate grade walks, none of which are essential for seeing key birds)



Royal Penguins (Nik Borrow)

The subantarctic islands of New Zealand and Australia are amongst the most isolated and least known places in the world. There are seven groups of islands in the region. The Chatham Islands, the Bounty Islands, Antipodes Island, Campbell Island, the Auckland Islands and Snares Island are sovereign territories of New Zealand, while Macquarie Island is a territory of Australia.

These islands all differ markedly in size and form and have contrasting vegetation. They are important refuges for a wide range of plants and animals, many of which are found nowhere else in the world. They are also breeding grounds for the countless seabirds and marine mammals that range over vast areas of the Southern Ocean. All the islands have

been designated as nature reserves – the highest form of legal protection that can be given to a natural area by the governments of New Zealand and Australia. The integrity of these remote islands and their natural values is maintained through strict controls on entry. Visitor numbers are restricted and only 600 visitors a year are allowed to land in the New Zealand subantarctic islands and only 500 at Macquarie Island. There are further restrictions on the number allowed ashore at any one time or on any one day.

Our subantarctic islands expedition includes landings on the Auckland Islands, Macquarie Island, Campbell Island and the Chatham Islands, and zodiac cruises at Snares Island, Antipodes Island and the Bounty Islands. With a maximum of only

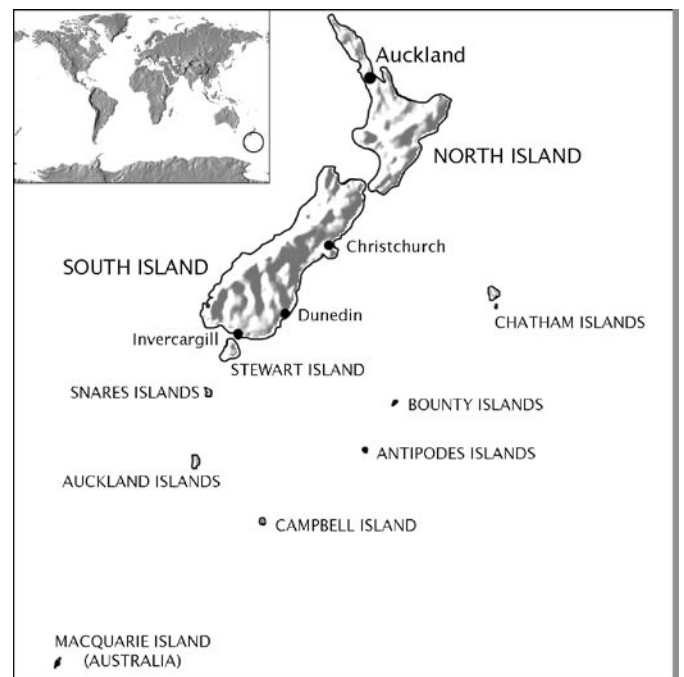
48 passengers plus staff on the expedition we are well within the allowable daily limits and everyone can go ashore at one time. The result is that we can spend entire days, not hours, ashore on some of the most remarkable islands in the world. This specially extended itinerary provides the most comprehensive cruise around the subantarctic islands that is available and will allow participants to experience for themselves the full range of the wonderful birdlife, other aspects of natural history and scenery that these fascinating islands have to offer.

The birdlife of the subantarctic islands is dominated by their spectacular seabirds. Quite a number are endemic (at least as breeding species) to the subantarctic and temperate regions of Australasia, including Snares Crested, Erect-crested, Royal, Yellow-eyed and Little Penguins, Gibson's, Antipodean, Northern Royal, Southern Royal, Northern Buller's (or Pacific), Southern Buller's (or Buller's), Salvin's, Chatham and Campbell Albatrosses, Cook's, Mottled, Chatham Island and Westland Petrels, Buller's and Hutton's Shearwaters, and Chatham

Island, Campbell Island, Auckland Island, Bounty Island, Pitt Island and Macquarie Island Shags. Many other seabirds occur in the area, including King, Gentoo and Rockhopper Penguins, Wandering (or Snowy), White-capped, Black-browed, Grey-headed and Light-mantled Sooty Albatrosses, numerous petrels, shearwaters, prions and storm-petrels, and Common Diving Petrel.

The subantarctic islands also have some interesting landbirds, some of which are endemic, and in particular we shall be hoping to see Chatham Island Oystercatcher, the strange Shore Plover, Auckland Island Snipe, Chatham Island Pigeon, Antipodes Island Parakeet and Chatham Island Gerygone. Marine mammals are also a feature of the area and we should see large numbers of New Zealand (or Hooker's) Sealions and New Zealand Fur Seals, and an assortment of cetaceans.

We shall be sailing on the *Professor Khromov* (capacity 48 passengers), a ship operated by *Heritage Expeditions* (who call her *Spirit of Enderby*). Ships of this class are Finnish-built vessels under Russian





Auckland Island Snipe (Tony Disley)

registry that were built in the 1980s and early 1990s under commission from the Academy of Sciences in Moscow. They were originally intended for oceanographic research, but were subsequently adapted for expedition-style cruising following the financial cutbacks that later affected all formerly Soviet research programmes. These ships are, of course, not 'cruise ships' in the traditional manner and will appeal most to those for whom exploring wild places and enjoying wild nature, rather than enjoying luxurious surroundings and 'black-tie' dinners with the officers, is the prime attraction.

Cabins are furnished with two berths and have some storage space and an outside view (many having en-suite bathroom facilities). Public facilities include restaurant, lounge/bar, lecture facilities and library. Food is plentiful, of good quality, waiter-served and prepared by European, New Zealand or Australian chefs. The ship carries a small complement of guest lecturers, including a naturalist, who give informal talks on the environment, wildlife and history of the subantarctic region and also

guide shore excursions.

As much of the sailing as possible is done at night, thus maximizing opportunities for going ashore and enjoying the beautiful subantarctic landscape to the full. Landings are carried out by means of a fleet of zodiacs, the rugged, fast-moving inflatables developed by Jacques Cousteau for expedition work which allow safe landings on remote coastlines in all types of conditions. The sheer speed and efficiency with which the crew carry out these landings, coupled with the small complement of passengers, allows everyone plenty of time ashore. Further information about the cruise, including photographs and details of the ship layout, including cabin layouts, are available on the Ocean Adventures (at Birdquest) website (www.oceanadventures.co.uk). The great advantage of taking this particular cruise, if you are especially interested in seeing the subantarctic islands' fantastic wildlife, is that the itinerary and day to day schedule are strongly wildlife-orientated, and the group will greatly benefit by having an experienced ornithologist guide.

Birdquest has operated tours to the Subantarctic Islands of New Zealand and Australia since 1998.

Itinerary

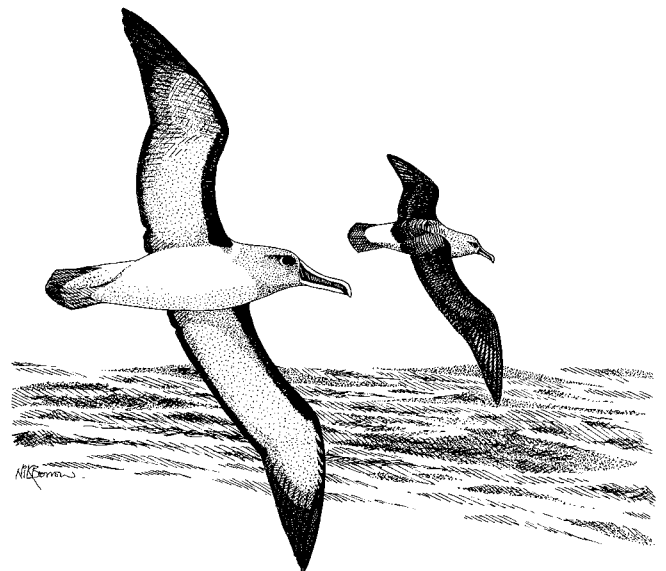
Day 1 The tour begins this evening at Invercargill at the southern tip of South Island, where we will stay overnight.

Day 2 After breakfast we will transfer to our ship which will be berthed at the nearby Port of Bluff. We will spend the next 17 nights aboard. After boarding we will make ready for departure, setting a course for Snares Island to the south of New Zealand proper. This first leg of our journey will provide our first opportunity to see pelagic species. Watch out for Gibson's (split from Wandering), Southern Royal, White-capped (or Shy) and Salvin's (split from White-capped) Albatrosses, and Sooty Shearwaters – there are an estimated 3-4 million of the latter nesting on Snares Island! In addition, Mottled Petrel, Broad-billed Prion and Common Diving Petrel should all feature on the list for the first time today.

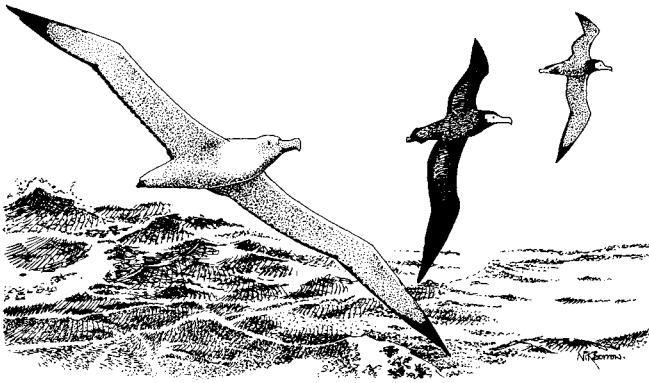
Day 3 Snares Island is the first of the subantarctic islands that we will be visiting. It is an amazing

place (half as many seabirds nest on this one small island as there are seabirds nesting in the entire British Isles!). We will make landfall in the early morning, marvelling at the incredible numbers of Sooty Shearwaters and Common Diving Petrels sweeping past as they head out to sea after leaving their nesting burrows ashore. Landings are not permitted, so we will zodiac cruise the sheltered eastern side. We should see all of the birds that are found on the island. Snares Crested Penguins are plentiful around the coast, as are Cape Petrels. Southern Buller's (or Buller's) Albatross nest here late in the season and may already be in the vicinity. Cruising in the sheltered bays we will see the endemic races of the Tomtit and the Fernbird (the former is an unusual, all-black form and may represent a distinct species), while Red-billed Gulls and Antarctic Terns will be feeding around the coastline. Later we will sail for the Auckland Islands.

Day 4 As dawn breaks we will be at Enderby Island in the Aucklands group, a great island to bird. We will make a landing at Sandy Bay, the main breeding ground for the New Zealand (or Hooker's) Sealion. As well



Southern Buller's Albatrosses (Nik Borrow)



Wandering Albatrosses (Nik Borrow)

as an impressive number of sealions we should also see Yellow-eyed Penguin, Southern Royal and Light-mantled Sooty Albatrosses, Northern Giant Petrel, the endemic Auckland Island Shag, the flightless Auckland Island Teal (split from Brown Teal) and the Auckland Islands races of Double-banded Plover and Tomtit. We will spend some time searching for the delightful little Auckland Island Snipe, another subantarctic islands endemic, which we should find creeping through the rich herbage. Other, more widespread birds include Subantarctic Skua, Red-billed Gull, Red-crowned Parakeet, Bellbird and Australasian (or New Zealand) Pipit, plus introduced Song Thrush, Common Blackbird, Common Starling, Lesser Redpoll and European Goldfinch. Sometimes the dashing New Zealand Falcon makes an appearance. On Derrycastle Reef there is a good chance to see Bar-tailed Godwit, Ruddy Turnstone and perhaps other migratory waders. Later we sail south towards the main Auckland Islands group.

Day 5 After we arrive at Carnley Harbour, in the south of the main Auckland Islands, there will be an opportunity for the more energetic to climb up to the White-capped Albatross

colony at Southwest Cape. The scenery here is dramatic, with the wave-lashed cliffs far below and wonderful views over the southern Aucklands, while, all around one, large numbers of White-capped Albatrosses sit on their nests, display to their mates, preen each other or sail past on those long, long wings. Gibson's Albatrosses nest amongst the grassy tussocks on the high plateau above the White-capped Albatross colony. We should get marvellous views of these huge birds as they will be nesting at this time. We may also see one of the New Zealand Falcons that frequent the vicinity. Those electing to remain on board will visit one of a number of historic sites in the area.

Day 6 As we continue towards Macquarie Island, surely one of the most inaccessible birding Meccas in the world, the excitement will be palpable. We will be at sea all day, providing us with yet another wonderful opportunity to see pelagics, including a fantastic selection of albatrosses which will likely include our first Wandering (or Snowy), Grey-headed and Campbell (split from Black-browed), as well as White-chinned and White-headed Petrels, and Grey-backed and Black-bellied Storm-Petrels.

Day 7 We will arrive at far-flung Macquarie Island, the most southerly of the subantarctic islands, in the late morning or early afternoon. We shall hope to land at both the ANARE base and at Sandy Bay. We will also zodiac cruise in Lusitania Bay. Macquarie is, of course, the only place in the world where one can observe the Royal Penguin and there is certainly no shortage of these. We will visit a large breeding colony at Sandy Bay, below which thousands of these cute creatures loaf on a sandy beach. Some individuals are so inquisitive that if you sit down they will wander over and tentatively peck at your rubber boots! The handsome King Penguin is also found in large numbers, while two other penguin species breed on Macquarie Island, the Gentoo and the Rockhopper. In addition, we will also see the endemic Macquarie Island Shag. Common Starlings eke out a meagre existence in this harsh place at the veritable ends of the earth, while Lesser Redpolls are of particular interest to visiting Aussie birders, this being their only Australian locale!

Day 8 We will continue our exploration of Macquarie Island and then depart for Campbell Island.

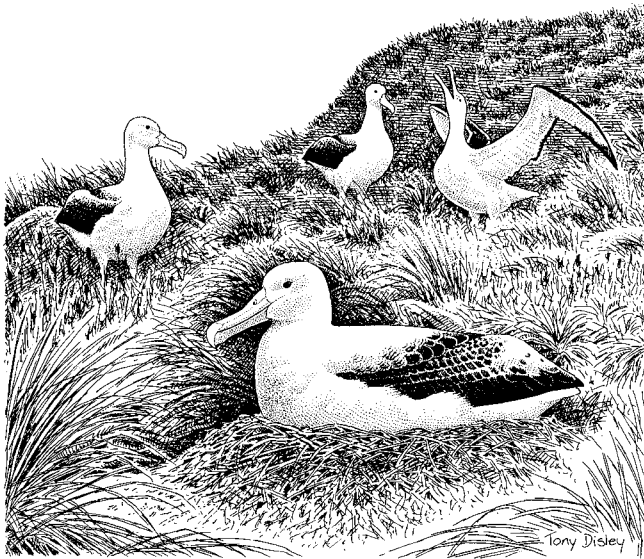
Day 9 At sea today we will see a similar range of seabird species to those we saw en route from the Auckland Islands to Macquarie Island, perhaps with the addition of Southern (or Antarctic) Fulmar, Blue Petrel and, with luck, Grey Petrel.

Day 10 Campbell Island is a great spot. Sadly rats got ashore shortly after the island was discovered and wrought havoc with many of the smaller nesting petrels and prions. The rates have recently been eradicated, after a major campaign, but it will be some time before seabird populations recover.

Nevertheless, there is still some great birding and an opportunity to get some good photographs, especially of Southern Royal Albatross. We will be able to sit quite close to these huge but gentle seabirds and we may well see their elaborate bill-clattering courtship ritual. We will spend a whole day ashore in order to see these and other breeding species such as Rockhopper Penguin, the beautiful, gentle-looking Light-mantled Sooty Albatross, Northern Giant Petrel, the endemic Campbell Island Shag, Subantarctic Skua, Red-billed and Kelp Gulls, and Antarctic Tern. Resident passerines include the inevitable introductions: Dunnock, Common Blackbird and Lesser Redpoll. The island is famous for its 'megaherbs', unique subantarctic flowering plants that will just be coming into bloom at the time of our visit. Campbell Island scenery is impressive with great lowering headlands, mile after mile of sheer cliffs, sweeping bays and pinnacle-shaped offshore stacks.

Day 11 At sea en route to Antipodes Island. This is another day for pelagic species, with more southerly elements continuing to predominate: Antipodean (also split from Wandering), Campbell and Grey-headed Albatrosses, Southern Giant Petrel and Little Shearwaters should all be encountered. We will endeavour to sort out Fairy Prion, Fulmar Prion and Antarctic Prion, which is not always easy, and we should get some great views while puzzling over these tricky little 'tubenoses'. Other species to be on the lookout for include Soft-plumaged and Grey-faced (or Great-winged) Petrels, and Wilson's Storm-Petrel. With luck we could come across a rarity such as Kerguelen Petrel.

Day 12 We should arrive off Antipodes Island, one of the most isolated of the subantarctic islands, during



Southern Royal Albatrosses (Tony Disley)

the morning. Weather permitting, we will zodiac cruise the coastline. We will be keen to see the uncommon Antipodes Island Parakeet and also the well-marked endemic race of the Red-crowned Parakeet. We will also see the endemic Antipodes race of the Australasian Pipit. Introduced Common Starlings and Lesser Redpolls are also present. Both Rockhopper and Erect-crested Penguins frequent the coastline and there are usually a good number of Antarctic Terns and Kelp (or Southern Black-backed) Gulls present. As we depart Antipodes Island this evening we will keep a watch out for Grey Petrel. Although it is a winter breeder there may still be one or two birds present.

Day 13 We will reach the Bounty Islands in time for a morning zodiac cruise. These inhospitable granite rocks are lashed by the Southern Ocean and are almost entirely devoid of vegetation. Here we will find both Erect-crested Penguin, a species restricted

to the Bounty Islands and Antipodes Island, and the endemic Bounty Island Shag, along with large numbers of Salvin's Albatrosses and New Zealand Fur Seals. In addition, Fulmar Prions nest on the islands and, unusually for a prion, are active around the cliffs in daylight.

Day 14 A day at sea with the chance to see more of the species seen previously and to look out for new ones such as Northern Royal Albatross, Chatham Albatross (split from White-capped), Northern Buller's (or Pacific) Albatross (split from Southern Buller's or Buller's) and White-faced Storm-petrel, as we near the Chatham Islands. As we head northwards there is a small but real chance of encountering Chatham Island Petrel, which breeds only in the Chathams, and we will all secretly be hoping for the miraculous appearance of a Magenta Petrel (or Taiko), a near-extinct species that breeds in the Chathams and which has only been seen at sea a few times in the modern era.

Day 15 Today we arrive at the Chatham Islands. This remote archipelago has been isolated for thousands of years and both the birds and plants show a high degree of endemism. Sadly, many of the species have become extinct because of extensive development and burning. As we approach the Chatham Islands we will sail past Pyramid Rock, the sole breeding ground of the Chatham Albatross. Later we will visit South East Island. Landings are not permitted on this island, but we will be able to have excellent close view of the endemic Pitt Island Shag, Chatham Island Oystercatcher and the attractive Shore Plover from the zodiacs. Only about 150 individuals of the latter survive, so to see this remarkable shorebird feeding on the wave-cut rock platforms will be one of the highlights of our visit to the Chathams. We should also see a few Tui and will be looking out for the endemic race of the Tomtit.

Day 16 During our birding excursion on Chatham Island itself we should see the endemic Chatham Island Shag, the rather portly Chatham Island Pigeon (split from New Zealand Pigeon) and Chatham Island Gerygone (or Chatham Island Warbler). Other species we should see include Little Penguin, White-faced Heron, Pacific Black (or Grey) Duck, Weka (a flightless, chicken-sized rail), Masked Lapwing (known locally as Spur-winged Plover), Double-banded Plover, Red-billed Gull, White-fronted Tern, Australasian (or New Zealand) Pipit, Welcome Swallow and Silvereye, and also some introduced European species such as Song Thrush, Common Starling, House Sparrow, Common Chaffinch, European Goldfinch and Lesser Redpoll.

Days 17-18 As we travel towards the mainland we will cross what is known as the Chatham Rise, a relatively shallow area of water compared with the surrounding ocean. This is also a great place for pelagic seabird watching with an overlap of both northern (i.e. temperate zone) species and those birds that favour southern latitudes. We can expect to see Cook's and Westland Petrels, Flesh-footed, Buller's and Hutton's Shearwaters, and Australasian Gannet, as well as more Northern Royal and Chatham Albatrosses, and 'water-walking' White-faced Storm-Petrels.

Day 19 Our ship will arrive in the morning at the port of Dunedin, where the tour ends.

Accommodation & Road

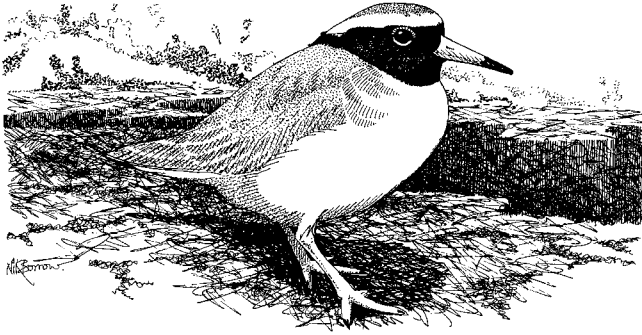
Transport: The hotel in Invercargill is of normal Birdquest standard. For details of the ship, see the introductory section. The transfers to the ship in mainland New Zealand and the only road excursion on the Chathams are by coach.

Walking: The walking effort is mostly easy, but there are a few optional harder walks.

Climate: Quite mild at this season. Temperatures range from cool to warm in the north of the subantarctic islands region and from cool to fairly cold in the south (although even in the south it can feel relatively warm on a sunny day if there is no wind). It feels decidedly cold on windy days at sea in the far south, however! Sunny spells are interspersed with (often longer) overcast periods and some rain is to be expected. In mainland New Zealand the weather is generally similar in character, but temperatures are typically quite warm at this time of year.

Bird/Sea Mammal

Photography: Opportunities are outstanding.



Shore Plover (Nik Borrow)

Important: Landings on some of the subantarctic islands are by permit only as administered by the Governments of New Zealand and Australia, and on rare occasions permits are refused. It is also important to bear in mind that circumstances may be encountered during the voyage which will make it necessary or desirable to deviate from the planned itinerary. These circumstances include poor weather conditions and unexpected opportunities for making

additional zodiac excursions. The ship's expedition leader will provide more information at the start of the voyage and keep us fully informed throughout. While as many landings as possible will be made, almost none of these are crucial in terms of actually seeing the local birdlife, which can almost invariably be seen from the ship or during an inshore zodiac excursion. Sometimes the cruise departure/arrival points in New Zealand may alter, but normally plenty of notice is provided.