

## WESTERN PACIFIC ODYSSEY

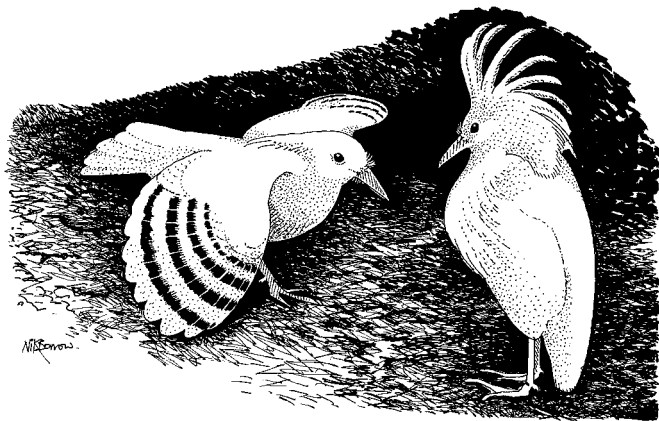
### *New Zealand to Japan*

*Sunday 17th April – Friday 20th May 2011 (34 days)*

*Leaders: Pete Morris and Heritage Expeditions staff*

*Group Size Limit: 17*

*Tour Category: Easy (but a possibility of one Demanding hike)*



*Kagus (Nik Borrow)*

When one thinks of the remote places on our planet, one often thinks of the far flung polar regions or the difficult to reach high mountain ranges such as the Andes or the Himalayas. With four fifths of the globe covered in water, some of the most difficult areas to reach and explore are the great oceans and in particular the vast Pacific Ocean, where a number of endemic seabirds and landbirds are quite literally way off the beaten track. Anyone who has been on an expedition at sea will know just how exciting it is, and what a privilege it can be to be cast into the middle of the most difficult habitat to access, surrounded by seabirds that few have had the opportunity to see.

This particular voyage has been designed by birders for birders, and in particular, for the seabird enthusiast, and is a unique opportunity for those who love the thrill of a cruise in the Pacific. During the voyage, we will cover over 5,000 nautical miles, taking us right across the Western Pacific from New Zealand to Japan. En route, we will visit

several remote islands and atolls, themselves home to some exciting endemic birds, and we should also encounter a number of rarely seen cetaceans.

Our adventure will begin at Tauranga, situated in the Bay of Plenty on New Zealand's North Island, and we will spend our first day at sea looking for seabirds as we pass the outer reaches of the productive Hauraki Gulf. Here we hope to find such interesting species as Grey-faced and Black Petrels.

We will then make our way towards Norfolk Island. As well as several species of albatross more associated with colder water, we will also be on the lookout for a number of interesting petrels, such as Black-winged, White-necked, Tahiti and Kermadec Petrels. Weather permitting, our first landing will be on Norfolk Island, where we hope to find the endemic Norfolk Island Parakeet, Norfolk Island Gerygone and Slender-billed White-eye, as well as the more widespread Pacific Robin.

We will continue on our way north to New Caledonia, looking out for new seabirds,

such as Collared and Gould's Petrels, as we go. On New Caledonia, a visit to the Rivière Bleue National Park will be the highlight, for here we can find most of the New Caledonian endemics including the curious and unique Kagu. Other endemics may include New Caledonian Imperial Pigeon, Horned Parakeet, Southern Shrikebill, Yellow-bellied Robin, Streaked Fantail and Red-faced Parrotfinch and, with luck, Crow Honeyeater and Cloven-feathered Dove.

During our passage to the Solomon Islands we will again keep our eyes on the sea and should find more interesting species such as Providence Petrel and Polynesian Storm-Petrel. In the Solomon Islands we aim to visit four islands: Rennell, Makira, Gaudalcanal and Kolombangara, and although the montane endemics which require time and effort will be out of the question, we hope to see a good number (around a third) of the Solomon endemics, with highlights likely to include Rennell Shrikebill, Rennell Fantail, Rennell Starling, Rennell White-eye and Bare-eyed White-eye on Rennell; Chestnut-bellied Imperial Pigeon, White-headed Fruit Dove, Ochre-headed Flycatcher, White-collared Monarch, San Cristobal Starling, San Cristobal Melidectes, Sooty Myzomela and Mottled Flowerpecker on Makira; Red-knobbed Imperial Pigeon, Claret-breasted Fruit Dove, Ducorps's Cockatoo, Yellow-bibbed Lory, Buff-headed Coucal, Brown-winged Starling, Black-faced Myzomela and Midget Flowerpecker on Guadalcanal and Roviana Rail and, with luck, Kolombangara Monarch on Kolombangara. We will also find some of the more widespread endemics such as the impressive Solomon Islands Sea-Eagle, a number of splendid pigeons and perhaps the gorgeous Ultramarine Kingfisher.

After our action packed

four days in the Solomons, we will head for Bougainville and New Ireland where we will be hoping for two very poorly known seabirds, Beck's Petrel and Heinroth's Shearwater.

The passage north through equatorial waters is likely to see a lull in bird activity before we arrive in Micronesia. On Truk (or Chuuk), we will seek a series of endemics which include the delightful Caroline Islands Ground Dove, Caroline Islands Swiftlet, Caroline Islands Reed Warbler, Oceanic Flycatcher, Micronesian Myzomela, Caroline Islands White-eye and Micronesian Starling and, if time permits, we will also charter a speedboat to Tol South to look for Truk Monarch and, for those who can climb into the island's interior, Truk (or Faichuuk) White-eye.

It is then a long, and for periods quiet, passage to the Bonin Islands, though we should pick up our first Bannerman's Shearwaters, Bonin Petrels and Matsudaira's Storm-Petrels on this leg. Having completed our Japanese Immigration formalities in the Bonins, we will set sail towards Torishima Island, home of the much-wanted Short-tailed Albatross, surely one of the greatest prizes of this epic voyage.

Having feasted our eyes on this rare bird we will head for the mainland of Japan, though there may still be the opportunity for a stop in the Izu Islands where, as well as Streaked Shearwaters, Tristram's Storm-Petrels and Japanese Murrelets at sea, we will look for the Izu-endemic Ijima's Warbler, Owston's Tit and Izu Island Thrush, as well as other goodies including Japanese Woodpigeon and Japanese Robin. Our adventure will come to an end with our arrival in Yokohama in Tokyo Bay.

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 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 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 islands and landscapes to the full, though clearly with so much ground to cover, several full days will be spent at sea too. 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](http://www.oceanadventures.co.uk)). The great advantage of taking this particular cruise, if you are especially interested in seeing the fantastic wildlife of the remote Western Pacific is that the itinerary and day to day schedule are strongly wildlife-orientated, and the group will greatly benefit by having our experienced ornithologist guide.

Those taking shore-based programme in New Zealand will enjoy a full day pelagic trip in the Hauraki Gulf, in particular to greatly increase the chance of seeing New Zealand Storm-Petrel, as well as shorebirds such as Wrybill and New Zealand Dotterel at Miranda and a number of other New Zealand specialities. Upon arrival in Japan will spend a night near Narita airport (as the ship will arrive at Yokohama too late to catch a flight to London that same day). We will visit an area of nearby marshes where targets will include the localized Japanese Swamp Warbler, Bull-headed Shrike and the attractive Japanese Reed Bunting, as well as a selection of other species.

### Itinerary

**Day 1** The tour begins this morning at Auckland airport, from where we will head north out of the city for a two nights stay at Snells Beach. Later in the afternoon we will have time to explore a few areas near to Snells Beach where species we may see include Great, Pied and Little Pied Cormorants, White-faced Heron, Paradise Shelduck, Pacific Black Duck, Swamp Harrier, Australasian Swamphen, Variable Oystercatcher, Masked Lapwing, Kelp and Red-billed Gulls, and Caspian Tern. Rather sadly, and a reflection of how greatly New Zealand's environment has been altered by careless introductions of introduced species, other

new birds likely as we travel through this area include Black Swan, Greylag Goose, Mallard, Eastern Rosella, Eurasian Skylark, Common Blackbird, Yellowhammer, Common Chaffinch, European Greenfinch, European Goldfinch, House Sparrow, Common Starling, Common Myna and Australian Magpie!

**Day 2** Today we will begin our exploration of the marine environment, taking a pelagic trip out into the open waters of the Hauraki Gulf in order to look for a fantastic selection of seabirds. Our prime target, and the main purpose of this pre-cruise pelagic, will be the rare New Zealand Storm-Petrel, which has recently been re-discovered in the waters off Little Barrier Island after a gap of more than a century! Based on recent observations, by devoting a whole day pelagic to the pursuit, we have a reasonable chance of success at this time of year, although it is a bit late in the season. Other likely seabirds include Flesh-footed, Buller's, Sooty, Fluttering and Little Shearwaters, Common Diving Petrel, Black and Cook's Petrels, Fairy Prion, White-faced Storm-Petrel, Little (or Blue) Penguin, Australasian Gannet and perhaps Pomarine Skua (or Pomarine Jaeger). If we are really lucky we will also come across the rare Pycroft's Petrel. We may also encounter Common and Bottle-nosed Dolphins or even a whale or two. We will spend the night back on the mainland, at Snells Beach.

**Day 3** As excitement rises, we will leave Snells Beach early and make our way to Tauranga, situated on the attractive Bay of Plenty. During the journey, we will have time to stop at Miranda, situated on the Firth of Thames, a large bay to the southeast of Auckland where New Zealand's largest concentration of migrant waders from northern Asia can be found during the

southern summer. By the time of our visit, numbers will be down, but species which may be present include Bar-tailed Godwit, Red Knot and Ruddy Turnstone, and maybe one or two of the more uncommon visitors such as Far Eastern Curlew, Terek Sandpiper, Sharp-tailed Sandpiper, Curlew Sandpiper and Red-necked Stint. Of greater interest for us, New Zealand breeding species such as South Island Pied Oystercatcher, White-headed Stilt and New Zealand Dotterel can also be found in this splendid area, along with the strange Wrybill, which should be present in good numbers. The Wrybill, which is unique in having a sideways-curving bill, has a population numbering only around 4000 birds, and is declining in the face of introduced predators and hydroelectric schemes. We should also find Black-billed Gull and perhaps a lingering White-fronted Tern. Having arrived in Tauranga, we'll make our way to the pier to embark the Spirit of Enderby, ready for our voyage of a lifetime. Later in the evening, we will set sail.

**Day 4** During our first full day at sea, we will pass through the outer Hauraki Gulf where we should find a fantastic selection of seabirds, including Flesh-footed, Buller's, Sooty, Fluttering and Little Shearwaters, Common Diving Petrel, Black and Cook's Petrels, Fairy Prion, White-faced Storm-Petrel, Little (or Blue) Penguin, Australasian Gannet and perhaps Pomarine Skua (or Pomarine Jaeger). If we are really lucky we will also find the rare Pycroft's Petrel. Here we will have our only opportunity during the cruise to observe the near-mythical New Zealand Storm-Petrel, which has recently been re-discovered in these waters after a gap of more than a century! However, as it is late in the season for this species, and as we only have limited

time in the known area of occurrence, our chances from the Spirit of Enderby are fairly slim. We will also visit some islands in the outer gulf where the uncommon Grey Noddy (or Grey Ternlet) occurs, and we will have a good chance of finding this uncommon species. Other species we may see as we head on towards Norfolk Island include Gibson's, Campbell Island and Black-browed Albatrosses.

**Days 5-6** We will continue our journey north towards remote Norfolk Island, spending two full days at sea. We will be passing through some rich waters for seabirds and time on deck should be rewarded, with possibilities including Black-winged, Tahiti, Kermadec and White-necked Petrels, as well as some of the species we have seen previously, and as we get towards the island we should begin to see a few more species with a more northerly distribution such as Providence Petrel, Wedge-tailed Shearwater and Common White Tern.

**Day 7** Today, weather permitting, we will make a landing on Norfolk Island. After three whole days at sea, it will be somewhat of a relief to get off and stretch our legs! Norfolk Island is home to the endemic Norfolk Island Pine, though it is three endemic landbirds that will be our main targets. We will visit an area of lush forest to find Norfolk Island Parakeet, Norfolk Island Gerygone and Slender-billed White-eye, though sadly several other endemics are already extinct! Later in the day we will explore the island to look at some of the breeding seabirds, which include the attractive Red-tailed Tropicbird, Masked Booby, Black Noddy and Common White Tern. We are also likely to find some migrant Pacific Golden Plovers and other more widespread species we may find here include Nankeen Kestrel, Emerald Dove and Silver-

eye, as well as a series of introduced species which include California Quail, Red Junglefowl, Crimson Rosella and Song Thrush plus others we will already have seen on New Zealand. Later in the day we will set sail for New Caledonia, dreaming of more seabirds and Kagus!

**Day 8** We will spend the day at sea and will cross a large underwater seamount which produces an upwelling which is a favoured feeding area for a number of exciting petrel species, in particular, a good number of *Pterodroma* (gadfly) petrels. Species we may well encounter during the crossing include Tahiti, Kermadec, Collared and Gould's Petrels, as well as Brown Booby, White-tailed Tropicbird and hopefully one or two less common species such as our first Polynesian Storm-Petrel or even the rarely recorded White-bellied Storm-Petrel.

**Days 9** Continuing on, this morning the coastline of New Caledonia, an overseas territory of France, will come into view, and we will arrive at the capital, Noumea, situated in the southeast of the island, in time for some initial exploration. Silver Gulls and Greater Crested Terns are likely to be present to greet us. Situated near the western edge of the South Pacific, the island is inhabited by people of Melanesian origin. The moisture-laden southeast trade-winds have swept the islands for millions of years, ensuring that the many of the valleys and hillsides are draped with lush, tropical rainforest, resulting in an endemic-rich avifauna. Indeed the New Caledonia group has at least 22 endemic species, of which two are feared extinct, and even on this short visit, we have a very good chance of seeing many of them, including the spectacular Kagu, the sole member of its family.

**Day 10** Our full day on New Caledonia will largely

be spent birding in the magnificent forest of the attractive Rivière Bleue reserve. The reserve preserves the finest remaining forests in New Caledonia and is home to the incomparable Kagu. The Kagu is an extraordinary bird: like much of the flora and fauna of New Caledonia, it seems to belong to another age, having evolved in isolation during the millions of years since the island broke away from Gondwanaland and drifted eastward into the Pacific Ocean. The Kagu is a little larger than a domestic chicken. It is flightless, the only member of the family Rhynochetidae, and is thought to be most closely related to the rails and cranes, although it superficially resembles a pale night heron. The Kagu is endemic to New Caledonia and is the island's national bird, but due to deforestation and predation by dogs the species is now in serious danger of extinction: estimates put the remaining population at 500 to 1000 individuals. A puppy-like yelping echoes through the forest as the Kagu gives its far-carrying call. We should all be able to observe this intriguing and unusual bird, and with luck we will even witness the bird's spectacular display, in which the wings are spread wide and moved in a fanning motion. With just one day in the park, it will be difficult to 'clean-up' but we should see a good variety of the species mentioned here. We should happen upon the strange and rare endemic Horned Parakeet, a beautiful parrot with a wispy crest. Other species seen regularly within the reserve include a series of additional endemics: White-bellied (or New Caledonian) Goshawk, New Caledonian Imperial Pigeon (the world's largest arboreal pigeon), New Caledonian Parakeet (split from Red-fronted), New Caledonian Myzomela (sometimes lumped in Scarlet Myzomela), Barred Honeyeater, New Caledonian Friarbird, Yellow-bellied

Robin, New Caledonian Whistler, New Caledonian Cuckoo-Shrike, Striated (or New Caledonian) Starling, the tool-using New Caledonian Crow, Green-backed White-eye and the superb Red-throated Parrotfinch. If we are lucky we will encounter the crow-sized Crow Honeyeater, whose rather dull name belies the beauty of both its melodious song and its striking appearance, complete with large red facial wattles, and the beautiful Cloven-feathered Dove. We should also see a variety of the more widely distributed species such as Whistling Kite, Rainbow Lorikeet, Glossy and White-rumped Swiftlets, Dark-brown Honeyeater, Fan-tailed Gerygone, Streaked and Grey Fantails, Southern Shrikebill, New Caledonian (or Melanesian) Flycatcher, Rufous Whistler, White-breasted Woodswallow and Long-tailed Triller, as well as the introduced Spotted Dove.

**Days 11-13** We will once again be at sea, this time heading for the far-away Solomon Islands. Once again, petrel spotting will be the order of the day, and we should have more chances to view some of the Pacific's special *Pterodroma* species such as Providence, Kermadec, White-necked, Gould's and Collared Petrels, and we should see a variety of other seabirds such as Tahiti Petrel, Sooty and Short-tailed Shearwaters, Wilson's and the spectacular Polynesian Storm-Petrels, Red-footed Booby, Lesser Frigatebird, Sooty Tern and Brown Noddy.

**Day 14** After another long sea passage, we will again be delighted to be back in sight of land, as this time we arrive at the unique Solomon Islands. Scattered in a loose oval to the east of New Guinea, the Solomon Islands are a quintessential South Pacific idyll, combining a classic landscape and tourist-free, easy-going island life with exotic endemic birds.

The nation is an archipelago of volcanic islands, still largely cloaked in luxuriant rainforest, sweeping down to golden sand beaches and fringing coral reefs. The environment is still remarkably pristine as most Solomon Islanders pursue their traditional life of fishing on the reefs and tending lush gardens hidden in the forest. Few tourists have discovered this Eden, and the Solomon Islanders remain overwhelmingly friendly and generous to visitors whilst retaining much of their cultural heritage. Difficult to reach and travel around, our opportunity to explore the archipelago by boat, rather than through a complicated series of flights, makes for a relaxed and rewarding introduction to the fascinating avifauna of these islands.

The first island we will visit will be Rennell, a World Heritage Site, and we will spend today exploring this beautiful island. Australian Ibis are remarkably tame and widespread across the island, behaving almost like farmyard chickens. Rennell is actually a raised coral reef, situated far out in the Coral Sea and is very unlike most of the other Solomon Islands, which are volcanic in origin and mountainous. Birds are abundant along the trails through the forest: the Rennell endemics, Rennell Fantail, the beautiful Rennell Shrikebill, Rennell Starling, Rennell White-eye and the weird Bare-eyed White-eye, are generally common and confiding, but the highly distinctive local form of the Golden Whistler (a potential split) is uncommon. Other passerines in this forest include three Melanesian endemics, Cardinal Myzomela, Fan-tailed Gerygone and Melanesian Flycatcher, as well as Yellow-eyed Cuckoo-Shrike and, with luck, Island Thrush (the latter found here at sea-level and resembling a small Common Blackbird). As elsewhere in the country, there is very little hunting

in the extensive forests and consequently we should be able to find a number of the larger species, including the endemic Silver-capped Fruit Dove, Pacific Imperial Pigeon, Mackinlay's Cuckoo-Dove and Singing Parrot, and we should also find the charming and diminutive Finsch's Pygmy-Parrot nibbling away at the trunks and branches of the roadside trees. Other species we may see here include Shining Bronze-Cuckoo, Glossy and Uniform Swiftlets, Moustached Treeswift and Collared Kingfisher, whilst we may also find Brown Goshawk (Rennell is the only island in the Solomons where this largely Australian species occurs). We should also see the spectacular Rennell Flying Fox.

**Day 15** After sailing through the night, we should awaken just off of the volcanic island of Makira, where we will go ashore and explore an area of forest which is accessible along a logging road. Whilst the montane endemics are beyond our reach, we hope to find a good number of lower altitude endemics and specialities. These may well include Makira endemics such as the attractive White-headed Fruit Dove, the impressive Chestnut-bellied Imperial Pigeon, Sooty Myzomela, San Cristobal Melidectes, White-collared Monarch, Ochre-headed Flycatcher, San Cristobal Starling and Mottled Flowerpecker, as well as a number of regional endemics such as Pied Goshawk, Red-knobbed Imperial Pigeon, Yellow-bibbed Fruit Dove, Cardinal and Yellow-bibbed Lories, and Chestnut-bellied Monarch as well as the more widespread Brahminy Kite, Rufous Fantail and Singing and Metallic Starlings. We will also have our first chance of finding the magnificent, and rare, Solomon Sea Eagle. Having enjoyed a fine morning's birding, we will transfer to the nearby Anuta Village where we will enjoy the fine hospitality of

the delightful and friendly local folk before returning to our ship and setting sail for Honiara on Guadalcanal. We should see a few seabirds as we go, such as our first Bridled Terns.

**Day 16** The name Guadalcanal is still synonymous with huge air and naval battles and bloody jungle warfare, for some of the fiercest fighting in the Pacific between Japanese and Allied forces took place on the island. Relics of that great struggle can be found littered throughout the island and its offshore waters, a stark reminder of darker days, when, for a brief period in history, Guadalcanal was thrust to the forefront of the world's stage. Now largely ignored and forgotten by the rest of the world, Guadalcanal, like the rest of the Solomons, is a sleepy backwater which receives few visitors from the outside world. An early start will see us landing on this island where we will concentrate our efforts on the endemic-rich Mount Austen. As we walk along an old road through patchy forest we will find a variety of Solomons endemics which may include Ducorps's Cockatoo, the attractive Ultramarine Kingfisher, the remarkable Buff-headed Coucal, Chestnut-bellied Monarch, Steel-blue Flycatcher, Midget Flowerpecker and Brown-winged Starling, and we may also find the uncommon Black-headed Myzomela, which is restricted to Guadalcanal. In the more open areas, Willie Wagtails, Olive-backed Sunbirds, Singing Starlings and introduced Common Mynas are conspicuous, and other widespread species we may see include the spectacular Blyth's Hornbill, Claret-breasted Fruit Dove, White-bellied Cuckoo-Shrike and Cicadabird. Late in the morning we will return to the ship and set sail for Kolombangara, further west

in the Solomons Archipelago. We will keep a keen eye open for Tropical Shearwater as we go.

**Day 17** Today we will visit the volcanic island of Kolombangara. Time and logistics require that we ignore the imposing volcano and instead concentrate on the lower areas where our main target will be the Roviana Rail, a species which was only described in 1991 but which, with luck, will emerge onto short grassland with the many Australasian Swamphens. A goose-like honking may reveal a pair of Solomon Sea Eagles sparring high overhead or an individual being mobbed by an Osprey. The endemic Solomon Islands White-eye is a common bird here and other lowland forest species include Yellow-vented Myzomela and White-capped Monarch as well as three rather scarce endemics, White-winged Fantail, Kolombangara Monarch and Solomon Cuckoo-Shrike, and with luck we will encounter one or two of the latter. Other more widespread species include Pacific Reef Egret, Striated Heron, Pacific Black Duck, Eclectus Parrot and Sacred Kingfisher. Later in the day we will set sail towards Bougainville where rare seabirds await!

**Days 18-19** Although we spend many days at sea during the tour, some are more eagerly anticipated than others, and these two days are in that category! We will spend as much time as possible over a deep water canyon on the southwest side of Bougainville and cruising past New Ireland in rich tropical waters which are a very productive area. Boobies, frigatebirds, tropicbirds and tropical terns (including with luck the localized Grey-backed or Spectacled Tern) are abundant here, but it is two rare and poorly known species, Heinroth's Shearwater and the recently rediscovered Beck's Petrel, that we will be

particularly eager to find. We are also likely to come across migrant Arctic, Pomarine and Long-tailed Skuas (or Parasitic, Pomarine and Long-tailed Jaegers), and will hopefully connect with some poorly-known cetaceans such as Dwarf Sperm Whale or Pygmy Killer Whale.

**Days 20-21** During these days we will continue our voyage north through equatorial waters. Although our daylight pelagic watch for birds and mammals will continue, this is often a pretty quiet period and a good time to relax. Species we may well see include Bulwer's Petrel, Wedge-tailed Shearwater and more boobies, tropicbirds and tropical terns, and we will keep an eye on the often calm seas for cetaceans.

**Day 22** As we keep steaming north, it will be a relief to once again spot land as we eventually arrive at Truk, or Chuuk as it is nowadays officially called, part of the Federated States of Micronesia. As we approach the famous lagoon, we will keep a keen eye out for the uncommon local form of the Tropical Shearwater, before heading ashore to complete the necessary customs exercises. Truk Lagoon was the scene of a famous naval-air battle in 1944 and the lagoon is littered with the remains of over 60 Japanese ships that were sent to the bottom, as well as numerous aeroplanes. Nowadays the whole area is a paradise for divers, with a worldwide reputation. The programme will depend upon when we arrive, but if time permits, we will charter a speedboat to the island of Tol South, one of the higher islands of Truk Lagoon. The island is rarely visited by outsiders, so our arrival is likely to cause a stir. Once ashore we have a steep climb in prospect, but our local guides will be able to help us reach the summit. First the lagoon must be crossed by speedboat (we should see

Black-naped and Greater Crested Terns en route), and then it will take us some time to climb up to the remaining good forest above 300m, but once there the white-eyes are generally quite easy to locate. We should also encounter the endemic Truk Monarch (usually at lower altitudes) during our visit to Tol South and we have a good chance of seeing the rare Truk form of the endemic Micronesian Imperial Pigeon. If time is short, we will explore Weno, or perhaps visit a nearer island where Truk Monarch also occurs.

**Day 23** Weno (or Moen), is the main administrative centre of Truk, and we will have the morning to find a few Micronesian endemic species which occur here. These may well include Caroline Islands Swiftlet, Oceanic Flycatcher, Caroline Islands Reed Warbler, Micronesian Starling, Micronesian Honeyeater (or Micronesian Myzomela) and Caroline Islands White-eye, whilst other species we may well see here include Grey-tailed Tattler, the beautiful Purple-capped Fruit Dove (the form here may merit specific status as Caroline Islands Fruit Dove) and, with luck, the secretive Blue-faced Parrotfinch. The main challenge however will be to find the beautiful Caroline Islands Ground Dove which can be rather elusive. Later in the day we will leave Truk and begin our long passage to the Bonin Islands, the southernmost point of Japan.

**Days 24-28** It is a long, long way to the Bonin Islands and we have over 1200 nautical miles to cover. Many of the tropical species that we have already seen will appear from time to time, and, as we head nearer to Japan, we should start to add a few new species such as the striking Bonin Petrel, Matsudaira's, Leach's and Madeiran (or Band-rumped) Storm Petrels, the rare and localized Bannerman's Shearwater and,

with luck, the migrant South Polar Skua.

**Day 29** At last we will be back in sight of land, and we will hope to call briefly at Chichi-jima in the Bonin Islands to complete arrival formalities for Japan. A walk in the vicinity of the harbour will introduce us to Japan and its birdlife. Here we are likely to find a few species such as Brown-eared Bulbul, Blue Rock Thrush (the *philippensis* form found here is probably better split off as a separate species), the distinctive local form of Japanese Bush Warbler and Japanese White-eye. This remote island may also yield the odd surprise. On the 2009 Western Pacific Odyssey, there was a visit to the nearby Haha-jima where the endemic Bonin Islands Honeyeater (actually a white-eye) occurs, but as far as we know there is no visit planned in 2011, so it would definitely be a major bonus if we get to this island. Later in the day we will set sail for the near-mythical Torishima Island.

**Day 30** The tiny volcanic island of Torishima is well known in birding circles as the island where just about the entire world population of Short-tailed Albatrosses breed. By May, they will be getting to the end of their breeding cycle as they take advantage of the rich feeding conditions in the North Pacific in the summer. Naturally enough, landings are not permitted on the island, but we plan to cruise close inshore for one of the seabird highlights of the trip, and we should get some great views of this very special bird.

**Day 31** We continue cruising north towards Japan, looking out for new species, such as Black-footed Albatross and Tristram's Storm-Petrel as we go. If weather and sea conditions permit we will zodiac cruise around the rocky stacks of Ko-jima where we hope to find the tiny Japanese Murrelet.

**Day 32** As we approach Miyake-jima we will see our first Black-tailed Gulls. Miyake-jima suffered from some serious volcanic eruptions in 2000 and as a result was closed to visitors for several years. Much of the forest on the island was destroyed, but fortunately some protected areas survived and here it is easy to find the Izu specialities. During the visit we hope to make we will explore the rocky coastline, grassy headlands and remaining forests. There is a wide variety of birdlife, including a number of specialities. The endemic Izu Islands Thrush is common, as is Ijima's Leaf Warbler. This latter species is restricted to the Izu islands as a breeding species and has hardly ever been recorded in the winter months, although it is suspected that it winters in the northern Philippines. Miyake-jima is also a reliable location for the localized Styan's Grasshopper Warbler, a small-island specialist that favours dense herbage close to the coastline. Other species we hope to find include Black-crowned Night Heron, the extremely localized Japanese Woodpigeon, Japanese Pygmy Woodpecker, Japanese Bush Warbler (known as 'the Japanese nightingale' due to its rich song), the stunning though elusive Japanese Robin, Japanese Tit (split from Great Tit) and the endemic Owston's Tit (the highly distinctive endemic Izu form of the Varied Tit which is unusually large and has chestnut cheeks). Later we will set sail for Tokyo Bay. The sheer number of Streaked Shearwaters in this sea area are quite staggering and we may well add one or two final oceanic birds to our lists, with candidates including Laysan Albatross and Red-necked Phalarope.

**Day 33** We will wake in Tokyo Bay at the end of what will have been an epic voyage and will disembark at Yokohama. It will be sad

to say goodbye to the ship that we will have grown so attached to during our epic adventure, but perhaps quite nice to re-acquaint ourselves with life on dry land! Later we will transfer across Tokyo to Narita airport (Tokyo's main international airport) for an overnight stay, before going out to explore some nearby areas. In spite of its proximity to the city, much of the region to the northeast of Tokyo retains a rural, market-garden atmosphere thanks to an abundance of level land, good soil and a mild climate. The lakes and marshes of the area are of particular interest to birdwatchers and we shall spend time at two wetlands with extensive reed beds. The main species we hope to find is the very uncommon and localized Japanese Swamp Warbler, here at one of its few known breeding grounds. At this time of year they are usually relatively easy to see as they songflight from the tops of the reeds. Also present will be Japanese Reed Buntings

in their neat black-headed breeding plumage, while other species we should encounter include Little Grebe, Great Cormorant, Yellow Bittern, Great, Little and Intermediate Egrets, Grey Heron, Black-eared Kite (split from Black), Eurasian Coot, Common Snipe, Oriental Turtle Dove, Barn Swallow, Japanese Skylark, Oriental Reed and Black-browed Reed Warblers, the smart Bull-headed Shrike, White-cheeked Starling, Grey-capped Greenfinch, Eurasian Tree Sparrow, Oriental Crow (split from Carrion) and Large-billed Crow. With a bit of luck we will also see Great Bittern and the endemic Green Pheasant.

**Day 34** After some final birding in the Narita airport area the tour comes to an end this morning.

**Accommodation & Road**

**Transport:** The hotels in Snells Beach and Narita are of normal Birdquest standard.

For details of the ship, see the introductory section. Transport on land will be by minibus for the pre and post cruise sections. During the cruise, any transport on land is usually by coach.

**Walking:** The walking effort is mostly easy, but there is the possibility of a strenuous uphill hike on Tol South, if time allows.

**Climate:** During this epic voyage we will experience a real variety of climates! In New Zealand at the beginning of the trip, conditions at this time of year are typically cool, with sunny periods and showers. As we head north the climate will gradually become warmer and by the time we reach New Caledonia it will be warm and fairly humid. Further north, from the Solomons until the Bonin Islands, it will be generally hot and humid, with a mixture of dry and sunny weather and overcast, rainy periods. Further north in

Japan, conditions are likely to be warm, but less humid, with the possibility of rain. There is the possibility of some windy weather at sea, and during these periods, it can feel distinctly cooler.

**Bird/Sea Mammal**

**Photography:** Opportunities are quite good.

**Important:** Please 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. In particular, the landings on Chichi-jima and Miyake-jima are dependent on being able to clear Japanese immigration and customs in the Bonin Islands, which is by no means certain. The ship's expedition leader will provide more information at the start of the voyage and keep us fully informed throughout.