



Tuamotu Sandpiper in the Tuamotus – the Holy Grail of South Pacific birding (Phil Tizzard)

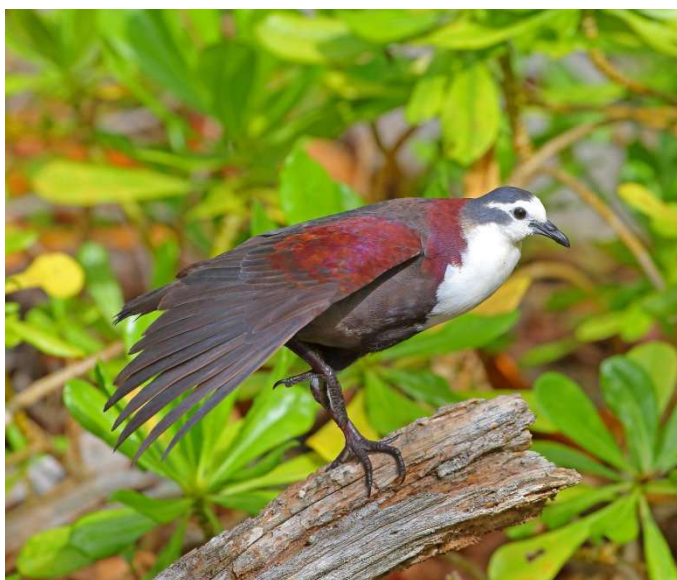
FRENCH POLYNESIA, PITCAIRN & HENDERSON

4/12 – 28/31 OCTOBER 2014

LEADER: DEREK SCOTT

Birdquest's third tour to remote French Polynesia, Pitcairn and Henderson was, like its predecessors, a great success. An eight-day pre-tour extension took us to five islands in the Marquesas; the main tour began with a day's birding in Tahiti before travelling on to the Gambier Islands to join the R.V. Braveheart for a two-week cruise to the remote Pitcairn Islands and Actaeon Group of the Tuamotus; and the short post-tour extension gave us two days on the lovely little island of Rimatara in the Austral Islands. Thanks to the efficiency of Air Tahiti, French Polynesia's domestic airline, our inter-island hopping all went very smoothly, and thanks to the skill and determination of Matt and his crew on the Braveheart, we were able to make landings on all the

islands on our cruise itinerary, despite some unfavourable winds and choppy seas. By enlisting the help of local experts and guides for some of the trickier birds, we had no difficulty in finding all 24 of the endemic land birds on our list, while by putting in long hours of sea-watching from the deck of the Braveheart, we saw most of the seabirds that we were expecting plus a few that we weren't. No fewer than 25 of the 68 naturally occurring species that we recorded are currently listed in *Threatened Birds of the World* as critically endangered, endangered or vulnerable, a sad reflection of the disastrous impact that human colonization and the associated introduction of rats has had on the native fauna of the eastern Polynesian islands. As was to be expected, the friendly and inquisitive Tuamotu Sandpipers on Tenararo Atoll were voted the most popular bird of the trip, but the cute little Henderson Crakes on Henderson, the amazingly confiding Polynesian Ground Doves on Tenararo and the colourful Ultramarine Lorikeets on Ua Huka in the Marquesas were also much admired. Other great birds included Murphy's, Juan Fernandez, Kermadec, Herald, Henderson, Phoenix and Tahiti Petrels, White-bellied and Polynesian Storm Petrels, Bristle-thighed Curlew, Blue and Grey Noddies, Grey-green, Atoll, White-capped and Henderson Fruit Doves, Marquesan Imperial Pigeon, Pacific Long-tailed Cuckoo, Tahiti and Marquesan Swiftlets, Society and Marquesan Kingfishers, Kuhl's and Stephen's Lorikeets, and Tahiti, Iphis and Fatu Hiva Monarchs. Somewhat less exciting but no less interesting were the six endemic reed warblers (Northern Marquesan, Tahiti, Southern Marquesan, Rimatara, Henderson and Pitcairn). Mammals were hardly a feature of this tour and cetaceans were surprisingly uncommon, but we did enjoy spectacular views of a Humpback Whale breaching repeatedly off Henderson Island.



The extremely tame Polynesian Ground Doves on Tenararo Atoll (Greg Homel) and the colourful Ultramarine Lorikeets on Ua Huka in the Marquesas (Phil Tizzard) were two of our favourites

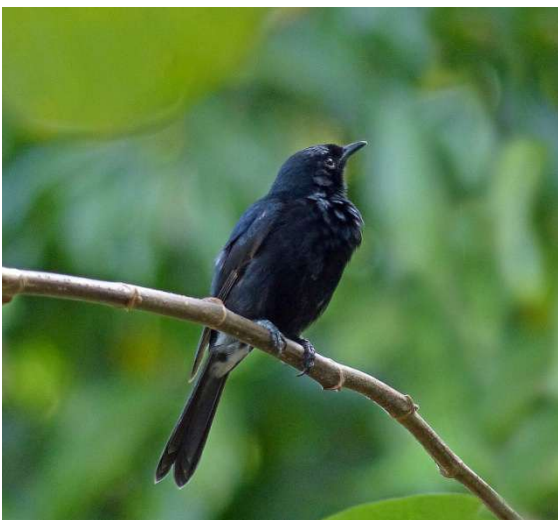
The pre-tour extension to the Marquesas began with a busy day. We were up well before sunrise to catch an early morning flight from Tahiti to Nuku Hiva, the largest of the Marquesas Islands. It was a long flight to Nuku Hiva and, with a stopover on Hiva Oa and a time-change, it was past noon before we arrived. Three vehicles were at the airport to meet us, and soon we were bouncing along a rough dirt track along the north side of the island. The scenery was quite spectacular and, at a particularly impressive lookout, we stopped for a picnic lunch. Here we saw our first Little White Terns, a very pretty tern which we were to find commonly throughout the Marquesas, as well as a Brown Booby and several White-tailed Tropicbirds. Initially the landscape was very arid and there were few birds about other than lots of the ubiquitous Red Junglefowl (a.k.a. feral chicken) and introduced Zebra Doves and Chestnut-breasted Mannikins, but as we headed eastwards the vegetation became more luxuriant and we began to see our first White-capped Fruit Doves and Marquesan Swiftlets – two of the Marquesan endemics that are still common and widespread in the islands. Eventually we came to the restored ruins of a *marae* (a sacred place used for both religious and communal purposes) at Kamuhei. Here in the tall fig trees surrounding the *marae* we found our main target on Nuku Hiva, the impressive and somewhat bizarre Marquesan Imperial Pigeon (or Nukuhiva Pigeon). The birds were surprisingly tame, allowing us to get good views of the strange protuberance over their bills. Here

also we found our first of many Northern Marquesan Reed Warblers and had great views of White-capped Fruit Dove and Marquesan Swiftlet. In mid-afternoon, we moved a few kilometres to the top of a pass where we had more great views of the pigeon, and then as evening approached, we continued on to the main town of Taiohae on the south coast. By Marquesan standards, we were a large group and it took three pensions to house us, but we all came together for an excellent dinner at Alice's Restaurant down by the bay.



Spectacular scenery on Nuku Hiva (Derek Scott) and our main target there, the unusual Marquesan Imperial Pigeon (Jacqui Licht)

Our second day in the Marquesas began with another scenic drive, this time on a good paved road across the middle of the island to the airport in the northwest. En route, we stopped a couple of times to admire the views and our last Marquesan Imperial Pigeon, and as we approached the airport, we paused to photograph a tree full of Black Noddies by the roadside. Our mid-morning flight to Ua Huka was on time, and we arrived at our lovely guesthouse in a wooded valley in the interior of the island in time for lunch. Our two targets on Ua Huka were the Ultramarine Lorikeet and Iphis Monarch, and it was not long before we had seen both of these from the veranda of the guesthouse. At first our views were poor and fleeting, but during the course of that afternoon and the next day, we really got to grips with the birds, discovering about ten pairs and family parties of the monarch and at least 25 lorikeets. Both showed extremely well on numerous occasions, although for most of us, the lorikeets proved to be somewhat camera shy. White-capped Fruit Doves, Marquesan Swiftlets and Northern Marquesan Reed Warblers were also common in the garden and woodland around the guesthouse, while Little White Terns were nesting in a large tree further down the valley. However, the only other birds about were all introduced species: Rock Dove, Zebra Dove, Common Waxbill, Red-browed Finch and Chestnut-breasted Mannikin.



Iphis Monarch and White-capped Fruit Dove were both fairly common around our guesthouse on Ua Huka (Phil Tizzard)

A change in flight schedules had necessitated that we spend two nights on Ua Huka, and so on our full day on the island some of us took up the guesthouse manager's offer of a trip into 'town' and down to the harbour in the back of his pickup. There wasn't much to be seen other than a small general store, a post office and a surprisingly impressive church, and the only birds of note were a Pacific Reef Heron down by the harbour and more Little White Terns, but it was a jolly little excursion.

We had time the next morning for a last look at the Ultramarine Lorikeets and Iphis Monarchs before heading to the airport to check in for our mid-day flight to Hiva Oa in the south of the archipelago. We then learned that the Twin Otter that was to take us to Hiva Oa had been unable to land at its first destination, Ua Poa, because of bad weather, and had returned to base! No-one seemed to know when it might arrive and after 90 minutes waiting, we were beginning to think that we might be stranded at what must surely be one of the smallest airport terminals in the world. As we sat outside the terminal waiting and watching for the plane, a Red-footed Booby, several Brown Noddies and a small flock of Sooty Terns flew over, and then suddenly the little plane appeared over the horizon and we were saved. The flight to Hiva Oa was great fun, and as we waited at the terminal for our ground transport to arrive, we spotted a Pectoral Sandpiper on the edge of the airfield. It was a 20 minute drive from the airport to the harbour in Atuona – the capitol of Hiva Oa and much the biggest town in the Marquesas – and by the time we boarded the small boat that was to take us to distant Fatu Hiva, it had already gone 3.00 pm. There was a strong wind blowing and the next four hours proved to be something of an ordeal as we bounced along at high speed in rough seas. Conditions for sea-watching were very poor, as only those sitting at the back of the boat had much chance of seeing anything and they were constantly being drenched by spray. There were, however, lots of birds about, including two Tahiti Petrels, a few Wedge-tailed Shearwaters, at least 40 Bulwer's Petrels, two Blue Noddies and about 20 Sooty Terns, but most of our views were very poor, to say the least. By the time we arrived at the little harbour of Omoa on Fatu Hiva, it was well after dark, most of us were wet through and several of us were not feeling in the best of health! Fortunately, our host Lionel was waiting at the wharf to greet us, and within 15 minutes we were settling into our rooms at the Chez Lionel guesthouse.



A rare Fatu Hiva Monarch (Greg Homel) and the Baie des Vièrges, Fatu Hiva (Derek Scott)

Our main target on Fatu Hiva, the Fatu Hiva Monarch, is one of the rarest birds in the world. Prior to the arrival of Black Rats on the island in 2000, the population was estimated at 400-1,000 birds, but since then it has plummeted and is now thought to number only about 50 birds. To ensure our success with the monarch, Lionel had enlisted the help of the local expert Arthur, and early the next morning, we set off with him up a steep-sided, wooded valley. The 300 m walk up the valley was not without interest, as it required four stream crossings on slippery rocks, but there were no major mishaps and Arthur was able to lead us straight to an occupied monarch nest in a hibiscus tree. The birds were incubating, and in the course of the next hour and a half, we were able to watch three changeovers at the nest and obtain great views of the birds. By mid-morning, we felt that it was time to leave these critically endangered birds in peace, and as we ambled slowly back down the valley, our attention switched to the Southern Marquesan Reed Warblers and White-capped

Fruit Doves, both of which are still fairly common. In the afternoon, we headed off in two 4x4s on an excursion to the scenic Baie des Vièrges, further up the west coast of the island. Our first stop was in Omoa harbour, where we had somewhat distant views of 15 elegant Blue Noddies flying about the cliffs. From here we had a very bumpy drive on a tortuous dirt road over the mountains to Hanavave on the Baie des Vièrges. The scenery was indeed spectacular and many photographs were taken, but there were few birds other than Chestnut-breasted Mannikins and the odd White-capped Fruit Dove, and it was very worrying to see so many Black Rats.

Soon after breakfast the next morning, we transferred to Omoa harbour and boarded our little boat for the journey back to Atuona on Hiva Oa. Fortunately, the sea was now relatively calm and we had a pleasant enough crossing, making a slight detour to pass close by the uninhabited Mohotani Island – last refuge of the endangered Marquesan Monarch. Sadly we had to give this one a miss, as we had no way of landing safely on the island and were ill equipped for the steep climb up to the forest where the monarchs survive. However, there were plenty of seabirds to keep us occupied, including a few Wedge-tailed Shearwaters, 20 Bulwer's Petrels, about 50 Great and Lesser Frigatebirds, several Red-footed and Brown Boobies, 50 Black Noddies, 15 Blue Noddies, 50 Little White Terns and 10 Sooty Terns. Back on Hiva Oa, we were greeted at the wharf by our jovial hostess Tania and taken to her very pleasant guesthouse on a hillside overlooking the town. Later that afternoon, some of us went into town for a stroll and a visit to the cemetery to see Paul Gauguin's grave, while others went looking for birds, but introduced Zebra Doves, Common Mynas and Chestnut-breasted Mannikins dominated, and the only native land birds were a few White-capped Fruit Doves and Southern Marquesan Reed Warblers.



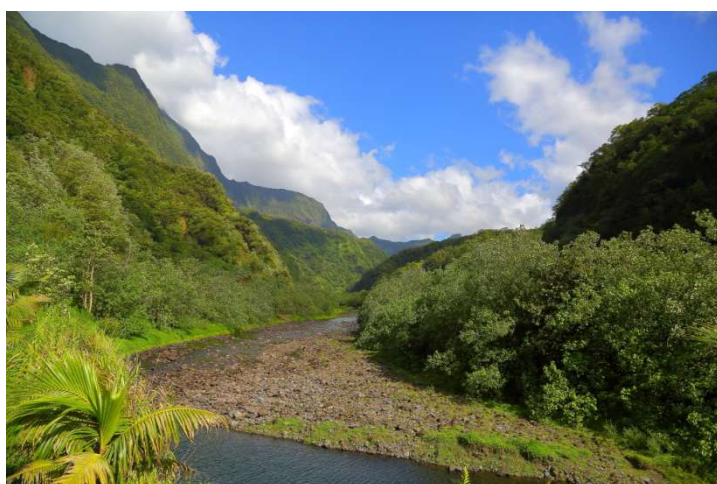
The Marquesan Kingfisher (Phil Tizzard) was our target on the rugged little island of Tahuata (Derek Scott)

The following day we took another boat trip, this time to the nearby island of Tahuata. The short boat journey to Motopu at the north end of the island took only 30 minutes, but produced a number of nice birds including a dozen Blue Noddies and a Spectacled Tern. Our target on Tahuata was the Marquesan Kingfisher, another rare bird now almost certainly confined to this one small island. The local kingfisher expert Loui Joseph was waiting at the wharf to greet us, and soon we were heading off in two 4x4s in search of our quarry. Such was our focus that we did not even stop when a Bristle-thighed Curlew flew up from the shore as we were driving away. We had only driven a few hundred metres when, much to everyone's surprise, we came to a stop outside the school in the middle of the village. Loui Joseph stepped out of his vehicle and pointed up at a juvenile Marquesan Kingfisher sitting high up in a large tree by the roadside. We did not have to wait long before both parents appeared and delighted us with some terrific views. Well pleased with this instant success, we set off again in search of more kingfishers. Loui Joseph seemed to know all the kingfisher territories, and soon after we saw another adult, although it was some way off. We spent the rest of the morning checking out other sites for the kingfisher and saw several nest-holes, but now the birds were living up to their reputation of being elusive. By mid-day we had reached the main village of Vaitahu on the west coast. After a pleasant picnic lunch on the beach, we tried another kingfisher territory in the hills behind the village, and here we found an occupied nest-hole in a dead coconut palm and witnessed a changeover at the nest. After returning to the village to pick up some snacks at the shop (which had been opened specially

for us), we tried one final kingfisher territory behind the village, but this drew a blank and we had to be content with our final tally of six individuals. Other birds encountered on this lovely island included about 20 White-capped Fruit Doves, a dozen Marquesan Swiftlets and 15 Southern Marquesan Reed Warblers, along with six Red-browed Finches and lots of Zebra Doves and Chestnut-breasted Mannikins. Our boatman Leo brought his boat round to Vaitahu to pick us up, and by 4.00 pm we were heading back to Atuona, well satisfied with our day on Tahuata.

Our week in the Marquesas Islands was now coming to an end and we could feel well pleased with ourselves, as we headed out to the airport the next day for our late morning flight back to Papeete on Tahiti. We had seen all of the extant endemics except two, Marquesan Ground Dove and Marquesan Monarch, both of which occur on small islands that are hard to land on. A Pacific Golden Plover on the airfield at Atuona added one last species to our Marquesan list, and then we were off, on the long flight back to Papeete via Nuku Hiva. The main tour officially began in the lobby of Le Royal Tahitien Hotel at 10.30 that evening, but by that time, most if not all of us were tucked up in bed!

It was an early start the next morning, as we wanted to beat the rush hour traffic in Papeete (the school run begins at 06:30!) and we had a rendezvous with our local guide at 07:00 at a beach park 20 km south of the town. We arrived well ahead of time and were quickly ticking off the common introduced species which dominate the bird fauna of Tahiti's coastal fringe: Rock Dove, Zebra Dove, Red-vented Bulbul, Silver-eye, Common Myna, Common Waxbill and Chestnut-breasted Mannikin. Our guide Yan Laurent duly arrived and we followed him up to a small car park at the entrance to the protected area in Papehue Valley. We had to wait a while for Yan's colleagues to arrive, but our time was by no means wasted. Within a few minutes, we had seen three of our five target birds on Tahiti, Grey-green Fruit Dove, Tahiti Swiftlet and Society Kingfisher. But our main target in Papehue Valley was, of course, the critically endangered Tahiti Monarch. This species is now known to occur in only four valleys on the west side of Tahiti. In 2012, the total population amounted to only 43 or 44 individuals occupying 25 territories. Thanks to an effective programme of rat control, there seems to have been a slight recovery in the population in recent years, but this situation could easily change. It was a walk of about a kilometre up the valley before we arrived in monarch territory, but once there, it did not take us long to find first a brown immature bird moulting into adult plumage and then a pair of adults at their nest. We had some great views of the adults as they made frequent changeovers at the nest. Several Grey-green Fruit Doves showed well in the canopy; there was a fairly large breeding colony of Tahiti Swiftlets on a nearby cliff, and a few Pacific Swallows flitted about amongst the trees. We heard Society Kingfishers calling in the forest, but it was not until we had almost returned to the car park that we had close views of one perched over the stream.



Our main target in Papenoo Valley was the endemic Tahiti Reed Warbler (Greg Homel)

It had been a wonderful morning and we still had time for a leisurely lunch back at our hotel in Papeete. Here, from the veranda, we could see a Wandering Tattler, a distant Bristle-thighed Curlew and several Common White Terns and Greater Crested Terns, while a Swamp Harrier and a Crimson-backed Tanager appeared briefly in the garden. We spent the afternoon birding in Papenoo Valley, on the north coast of the

island about 20 km east of Papeete. Our target here was the Tahiti Reed Warbler which favours areas with cane and bamboo, so we headed straight up the valley until we came to some large patches of suitable habitat. The reed warbler proved to be a bit elusive at first, but eventually we found several very obliging birds, including one of the striking almost black morph, and had terrific views. We also saw a little group of Pacific Black Ducks on the river, a couple of Grey-green Fruit Doves, another Society Kingfisher and a Pacific Swallow. This had been a great day, but now it was time to prepare for the real adventure that lay ahead.

We were up early again the next morning for our flight to the Gambier Islands, the south-easternmost of the French Polynesian archipelagos. A Swamp Harrier was visible from the plane window as we took off from Papeete, but there were no birds to be seen at rat-infested Tureia Atoll in the Tuamotus where we stopped briefly to drop off a few passengers. We finally arrived in the Gambiers in early afternoon, but there was a delay while we waited for the ferry to take us from the airport on Totegegite motu across the lagoon to the main town of Rikitea on Mangareva, and it was not until almost 4.00 pm that we met up with the captain Matt Jolly and crew of the R.V. Braveheart – the little ship that was to be our home for the next two weeks. We had soon settled into our cabins, but there were the usual delays with paperwork and it was not until dusk that we were finally underway, heading out of the lagoon and southeast towards the Pitcairn Islands. A big depression to the west of us had whipped up strong winds and high seas, and it was a rough night.

The wind eased somewhat during the night, and early the next morning, most of us were out on deck to see what lay in store during this, our first full day at sea. We soon began to see Murphy's Petrels and this proved to be fairly common, with the day's tally coming to about 30, but other birds were few and far between. A chumming session in the early afternoon produced a Polynesian Storm Petrel, much to our delight, but this did not stay around long, and the only other birds that we saw all day were a Juan Fernandez Petrel, a Cook's Petrel, a White-chinned Petrel and a Red-tailed Tropicbird. A medium-sized whale surfaced close to the ship in mid-afternoon, but this was the only cetacean.



Our first sight of Pitcairn Island at dawn, and the islanders coming out to greet us in their longboat (Derek Scott)

By sunrise the next morning, we were approaching Pitcairn Island, and by the time we had finished breakfast, we had arrived off the island and were ready to go ashore. The islanders came out in their sturdy longboat to take us ashore, and by 8.00 am we were stepping onto the wharf at Pitcairn, one of the remotest inhabited islands on the planet. After a warm welcome from the islanders, most of us set off in a fleet of quadbikes for a guided tour of the island, while a few of us opted to explore the island on foot instead. We had little difficulty in finding the endemic Pitcairn Reed Warbler ('sparrow'), which proved to be fairly common and responded very well to pishing. The birds showed a remarkable degree of variation in their plumage, with most birds having some white feathers and a few birds being almost wholly white. Apart from a few Wandering Tattlers on the shore, however, the only other birds were sea-birds: 30 Great Frigatebirds, a dozen Red-tailed Tropicbirds, a few Red-footed Boobies, Brown Noddies and Black Noddies, eight Grey Noddies and about 25 Common White Terns. After an extremely interesting morning exploring the island, we reconvened at Christian's Cafe in Adamstown for a very enjoyable lunch, and then paid a quick visit to the post office, market and little museum. It was all very pleasant, but one could not help wondering at the long-

term future of this far flung outpost of humanity, now with only 45 inhabitants. We said our farewells to the islanders and returned to the Braveheart in mid-afternoon, and then rounded off the day with a circumnavigation of the island, which produced our first Herald Petrel.



Adamstown, Pitcairn (Derek Scott) and the Pitcairn Reed Warbler or 'sparrow' – the only land bird on the island (Phil Tizzard)

The next day was a full day at sea. Most of the morning was devoted to a chumming session over 40 Mile Reef, a sea mount with depths as shallow as 70 metres, some 40 nautical miles from Pitcairn. While few birds showed any real interest in our chumming, there were lots of birds in the general area, including no less than 15 Juan Fernandez Petrels, three Kermadec Petrels, five Herald Petrels, 25 Henderson Petrels and a Christmas Shearwater, along with a few Murphy's Petrels, Red-tailed Tropicbirds, Brown and Black Noddies, Common White Terns and Sooty Terns. As we continued eastwards that afternoon towards Henderson Island, an albatross was spotted way off in the distance, sadly too far away for identification.

By dawn the next day, we had arrived off Henderson Island. After a hearty breakfast (traditional for parties going ashore for the day), we went ashore in the ship's Naiad – a jet-propelled inflatable with reinforced aluminium hull ideal for landings over coral reefs. Despite a substantial swell, the landing at North Beach proved to be relatively easy (compared with some of our subsequent landings), and we were soon heading off into the palm groves and woodland at the base of the limestone cliffs in search of the island's four endemic land birds. Several colourful Stephen's Lorikeets were soon located feeding in the flowers of coconut palms, a couple of Henderson Fruit Doves were spotted perched up on tree tops along the escarpment, and several pairs of Henderson Reed Warblers emerged out of the trees in response to pishing. The Henderson Crake took us a little longer, but by late morning we had found a very obliging individual under the palm trees in the abandoned campground.



Stephen's Lorikeet and Henderson Fruit Dove – two of Henderson Island's four endemic land birds (Phil Tizzard)

We now had the rest of the day to enjoy increasingly better views of the four endemics, admire the many other birds and explore further afield on this beautiful island. There was much to look at, such as the many Murphy's Petrels flying back and forth low over the beach, a group of Red-tailed Tropicbirds in their bizarre aerial display, Masked Boobies at their nests at the top of the beach, a little group of Grey Noddies on the cliffs, and five Bristle-thighed Curlews, a Pacific Golden Plover and two Wandering Tattlers on the beach, not to mention hundreds of huge hermit crabs. We returned to the ship in late afternoon, and as we cruised slowly round to the sheltered east side of the island, about 50 Henderson Petrels passed overhead on their way to their breeding sites on the top of the island. But the day was not over yet. As we entered the calm waters of East Bay, a young Humpback Whale breached in front of us. Over the next half hour or so, this young whale, presumably a male, put on a remarkable show for us, breaching at least 15 times. A huge adult Humpback, presumably his mother, remained close by, but was much less demonstrative, presumably because she was preoccupied keeping an eye on her son. Watching these two whales against a backdrop of the setting sun could hardly have been a better ending to a perfect day.



The coastal scrub and woodland on Henderson Island with all four endemic land birds, and a Henderson Reed Warbler (Derek Scott)

We returned to the island early the next morning for a few more hours on shore and again had great views of all four of the endemic land birds. Many of us hiked up onto the top of the plateau and followed the trails cut during the attempt to eradicate Polynesian Rats from the island in 2011. Here we found at least a dozen Henderson Crakes and had cracking views of the fruit dove and lorikeet. Sadly, the eradication attempt failed and it was clear to us that the rat population had now bounced back, as we observed at least 30 rats during our brief stay. For the time being at least, the endemic land birds seem to be coping, but the Henderson Petrels and other breeding seabirds may not be faring so well. Let us hope that the next attempt at rat eradication will be 100% successful. We finally left Henderson in late morning and started to head back west, stopping after lunch for a three-hour chumming session over a sea mount about 25 nautical miles from Henderson. The chumming session itself was not very successful, but our sea-watching from the deck this afternoon was some of the most rewarding of the cruise, producing our first Phoenix Petrel, a surprise Stejneger's Petrel, two Black (Parkinson's) Petrels and a White-bellied Storm Petrel, as well as 20 Murphy's Petrels, three Juan Fernandez Petrels, three Herald Petrels, four Henderson Petrels and 100 Red-footed Boobies.

When we awoke the next morning, we found ourselves holding station off the tiny atoll of Oeno, a picture-postcard island of white sandy beaches surrounded by a coral reef and covered in waving coco palms and scrub. Breakfast was early and by 06:00 we were going ashore, just as the sun was coming up. Oeno is home to a very large number of breeding seabirds, all of which are remarkably tame, and we had a wonderful time walking all the way round the island (only about 3 km!) and strolling about amongst the bushes in the interior. Much the most abundant species was Murphy's Petrel, and these were everywhere. Indeed, one had to walk with caution to avoid treading on the dark grey-brown chicks which seemed to be in almost every patch of shade. There were also lots of Red-tailed Tropicbirds and Masked Boobies nesting on the ground amongst the bushes, and Great Frigatebirds, Red-footed Boobies, Brown Noddies and Common

White Terns nesting in the trees. Several Christmas Shearwaters were discovered in the scrub above the beach; a couple of Kermadec Petrels and Herald Petrels were seen circling over the island, and there was a small colony of Sooty Terns in the interior. Cameras clicked away furiously as each new corner brought a new photo opportunity that simply could not be missed. Aside from the seabirds, there were also about 10 surprisingly tame Bristle-thighed Curlews on the beach, along with four Wandering Tattlers and two vagrant Sanderlings. Sadly, a Spotless Crake that appeared briefly at a small brackish lagoon near the north end of the island was seen by only one lucky observer. As we relaxed back on the ship that evening, those of us who remained out on deck were rewarded with several Kermadec and Phoenix Petrels.



Murphy's Petrel (Derek Scott) and Christmas Shearwater (Phil Tizzard) – two of the many breeding seabirds on Oeno

At sunrise the next morning, a handful of us returned to Oeno for a few more hours with the seabirds. Three Phoenix Petrels, two Kermadec Petrels and a Herald Petrel were seen over the Murphy's Petrel colony and another Christmas Shearwater was found, as well as a Brown Booby and a Pacific Golden Plover, but the Spotless Crake failed to put in another appearance at the brackish lagoon. We were all back on the ship by late morning and shortly before lunch sailed away from this wonderful island, heading west-northwest back into French Polynesian waters and towards the Actaeon Group in the Tuamotus. Sea-watching from the deck that afternoon was again very rewarding, producing 12 Juan Fernandez Petrels, five Herald Petrels, another Phoenix Petrel, our first Tahiti Petrel and another Black Petrel, along with lots of Murphy's Petrels.



Red-tailed Tropicbirds (Shaul Licht) and Masked Boobies (Derek Scott) were nesting everywhere amongst the bushes on Oeno

The whole of the next day was spent at sea. Much of the morning was devoted to a chumming session over Minerva Reef, where the sea was as shallow as 12 m in some places and the reef itself was visible through the clear water. A White-bellied Storm Petrel appeared shortly after we had started chumming, but this did not stay long and nothing else showed much interest in us. We chased a feeding flock of Red-footed Boobies, Brown Noddies, Common White Terns and Sooty Terns for a while, but by mid-morning we were

ready to move on. Birds were now few and far between, but with perseverance, we managed to build up a reasonable tally including six Juan Fernandez Petrels, two Kermadec Petrels, three Tahiti Petrels and another Black Petrel.

Next morning, excitement began to mount as the low profile of Tenararo Atoll appeared on the horizon. This is one of the very few atolls which support populations of the fabled Tuamotu Sandpiper; we knew that landings could be tricky, and the weather was not looking good. As we neared the island, Matt and the lads launched the Naiad and went off to investigate possible landing sites. In the end, it was decided that we would go for a landing at the usual landing site on the northwest side of the island, despite the fact that the wind was from the northwest and there was a big swell. The landing was indeed a bit tricky, as we had to jump from the Naiad onto a spur of coral and then pick our way across the reef to the beach, all the while watching for that big wave that could sweep us off our feet. Two of us balked at the prospect of doing this and remained on board, while the rest of us decided to take a chance. Fortunately, thanks to the great support offered by the lads, all went well, and by 7.00 am, we were safely ashore. The stories about the Tuamotu Sandpiper had not been exaggerated. As we walked up the beach, the birds flew out to greet us and ran about at our feet. The sandpipers were everywhere, even up in the trees, and were impossible to avoid, as wherever one stopped for more than a few moments, two or three would fly in to investigate. Many of them would even perform their display flight in response to our presence. The beautiful Atoll Fruit Doves were just as tame. There were a few in the woodland, but most were wandering about in the low scrub at the top of the beach and some were just as inquisitive as the sandpipers. It took us a little longer to find the Polynesian Ground Doves, as these were much less common and preferred the interior of the island, but when we did, they proved to be just as tame as the sandpiper and the fruit dove. The whole experience of seeing three such extremely rare birds being so extremely friendly was quite disturbing, as it is we humans and our rats, cats and dogs who have brought them to the verge of extinction. While these three species occupied most of our attention, there were also lots of breeding seabirds on the island, mostly Great Frigatebirds, Red-footed Boobies and Common White Terns, with smaller numbers of Red-tailed Tropicbirds and Masked Boobies. Several Murphy's Petrels were seen flying about over the island, suggesting that they too might be breeding. Other birds included several Pacific Reef Herons, a Pacific Golden Plover, about 30 Bristle-thighed Curlews and a couple of Greater Crested Terns. By the time we were ready to leave in late afternoon, it was approaching high tide and Matt was able to bounce the Naiad over the coral reef and bring it right up to the beach. This was excellent news for Anne and Jacqui who had stayed on board in the morning, as it meant that they could now land on the island without having to negotiate the jagged coral. All went well, and they were able to spend the best part of half an hour with the Tuamotu Sandpipers and Atoll Fruit Doves before the tide started to fall again and we all had to leave. We ended this wonderful day relaxing on deck as we circumnavigated the island.



Atoll Fruit Dove and Bristle-thighed Curlew were both quite common on Tenararo Atoll (Phil Tizzard)

Some of us went ashore on Tenararo for a few hours early the next morning, but most of us remained on board as the tide was low and the landing did not look at all easy! We were all back on the ship by mid-morning and soon after we were underway again, this time heading south towards a sea mount about 30

nautical miles away. A chumming session there after lunch produced nothing except a few Tahiti Petrels, and so we turned south-southeast and set off towards Morane Atoll in the south of the Actaeon Group. The sea was now very quiet and a full afternoon's sea-watching produced only two Murphy's Petrels, three Juan Fernandez Petrels, seven Tahiti Petrels, a White-bellied Storm Petrel, five Red-footed Boobies, two Common White Terns and a Sooty Tern.



Red-footed Booby and Common White Tern were two of the commonest breeding birds on Tenararo Atoll (Derek Scott)

By sunrise the next morning we were approaching Morane Atoll, home to another population of Tuamotu Sandpipers. We had been warned that the landing here could be very tricky, and as there was a stiff breeze blowing and a big swell, we were not very optimistic. Matt and the lads soon had the Naiad in the water and went off to look for a suitable landing place, but the tide was low and nothing looked even remotely possible. Rather than give up, we decided to hang around for a bit, and spent the morning circumnavigating the atoll. We remained sufficiently close to shore to see some birds including a tiny speck that was clearly a Tuamotu Sandpiper, but it was all very frustrating. After lunch, a snorkelling trip was arranged for those who wanted and just as this was coming to an end, Matt spotted a gap in the reef that the rising tide had now rendered navigable. It still looked pretty scary and only two of us decided to give it a go, but all went well, a successful landing was achieved and three Tuamotu Sandpipers were found during the hour ashore. In mid-afternoon, we cruised a few miles offshore and tried chumming again, but there was little about except for a few Murphy's Petrels and two Tahiti Petrels. We remained in the Morane area until after dinner and then started heading back east towards the Gambier Islands.



The tricky landing site on Tenararo Atoll and the big swell at Morane Atoll (Derek Scott)

By dawn the next morning we were only 40 nautical miles west of the Gambiers. We were still hoping to see more Polynesian Storm Petrels and so we tried another long chumming session after breakfast, but no storm

petrels obliged and the only birds of note were our first Tropical Shearwater, a few Murphy's Petrels and a Black Petrel. As we entered the lagoon around the Gambiers, we came across several Brown Boobies and two Blue Noddies, but the lagoon itself was largely devoid of birds. We eventually arrived off the tiny islands of Motu Teiku and Makaroa and here we lingered until evening to witness the return of the Christmas Shearwaters and Tropical Shearwaters to their breeding colonies. A few Christmas Shearwaters appeared over the islands in mid-afternoon, but it was not until half an hour before sunset that they began to arrive in numbers. The first Tropical Shearwaters did not appear until just before sunset, coming in at high altitude and then circling high over Motu Teiku. We left as the light began to fade, by which time we had seen about 40 Christmas Shearwaters and a dozen Tropical Shearwaters, and then headed back out to sea for the night.



Motu Teiku (left) and the view from Kamaka in the Gambier Islands (Derek Scott)

On our final morning at sea, we spent three hours chumming about 15 nautical miles southeast of the Gambiers, but no storm petrels appeared and just about the only birds that showed any interest were a couple of Murphy's Petrels and a very obliging Black Petrel that kept settling on the water at the stern of the ship. In mid-morning we re-entered the lagoon and made straight for Kamaka, a privately-owned island with a single inhabitant, the amiable owner Johnny Reasin. We had been invited to hold our final barbeque lunch at his humble abode and this we did with great pleasure. It was a very pretty little island and we had time to explore and admire the views, but sadly it was just about devoid of birds except for the odd Pacific Reef Heron, Wandering Tattler and Common White Tern. From Kamaka, it was only an hour's run to Rikitea on Mangareva, and by 3.45 pm we were berthing at the wharf at the end of our two-week cruise. Customs and immigration formalities were speedily handled by Matt, and we had plenty of time to go ashore, walk around the pretty little town and visit the rather grand church. Sadly the birding potential on this large, well-wooded but rat-infested island is very limited, the only land birds being domestic chickens and a few recently introduced feral pigeons! Our final dinner on the Braveheart that evening was an extremely jolly affair, with some of us staying up rather later than was perhaps sensible, given that we had a long journey ahead of us the next day.

Fortunately, there was no great panic the next morning and we had plenty of time to say our farewells to Matt and his terrific crew and to have one last walk around the lovely little Braveheart. She had served us well, despite her shortage of bathrooms! The ferry from Rikitea to Totegegie airport left at mid-day, and by mid-afternoon, we were on our way back to Tahiti at the end of the main tour.

All but two of us were taking the post-tour extension to Rimatara in the Austral Islands, and so it was only a slightly reduced group that met on the veranda of Le Royal Tahitien Hotel for breakfast the next morning. Having seen very few cetaceans on our two-week cruise on the Braveheart, we were pleasantly surprised to see a school of about 50 Spinner Dolphins loafing about in the lagoon off the hotel, while in the garden we found a Striated Heron and all the usual introduced birds including a pair of Crimson-backed Tanagers. Our late morning flight to Rimatara was trouble free; we were met at the airport by our hosts Claudine and Georges, and by 2.30 pm, we had arrived at our lovely guesthouse on the edge of Amaru village. Our main targets on Rimatara were the two endemics, Kuhl's Lorikeet and Rimatara Reed Warbler, and it didn't take us long to find them. Both had been seen in the garden of the guesthouse even before we had all stepped out of the vehicles! After a quick lunch, we took a stroll along the road to Mutuaura village on the south coast

and were quickly rewarded with excellent views of the colourful lorikeets and inquisitive reed warblers, both of which turned out to be common over the whole island. We were a bit surprised to find a White-tailed Tropicbird nesting amongst the coconuts in a palm tree by the roadside, and even more surprised to find a flock of 11 Pacific Black Ducks walking about on the beach at Mutuaura, but the only other birds we encountered this afternoon were a Great Frigatebird, a few Brown Noddies and Common White Terns, and about 20 Chestnut-breasted Mannikins.



Kuhl's Lorikeet (Jacqui Licht) and Rimatara Reed Warbler (Derek Scott) – the two endemic land birds of Rimatara

We had thought that our full day on Rimatara would be a day of relaxation, perhaps obtaining better photos of the two endemics, perhaps doing some sea-watching, or perhaps doing a bit of sightseeing. However, it soon emerged that the early risers had seen four Pacific Long-tailed Cuckoos before breakfast: one flying through the garden of the guesthouse and three on the nearby hill. We now had a project: getting good views of this difficult bird for everyone in the group. Unbeknownst to us, Claudine had arranged for the local lorikeet expert and rat controller Mooroa Tiraha to take us on a guided tour of the island in his pickup. He arrived after breakfast and we asked him if he knew where we could find the cuckoo. He had just explained that this was a difficult bird to see, when one flew over our heads and landed in a palm tree by the gate. Unfortunately, it was soon chased off by a Brown Noddy and several of us missed it, so a group of us jumped into the back of the pickup and told Mooroa to find us another. This he did without difficulty. He drove straight to the top of Mount Nahu (at 84 m, the highest hill on the island), walked to a clump of trees and pointed out a cuckoo! Again the bird did not stay long and was missed by two of us. We spent some time on the 'mountain', but failed to see the cuckoo again and eventually abandoned the search in favour of a general tour of the island. This was very interesting and great fun, but produced little in the way of birds except for a few Pacific Black Ducks, two Red-tailed Tropicbirds, three Pacific Reef Herons, three Wandering Tattlers and lots more lorikeets and reed warblers. We reconvened for lunch at the guesthouse, and then in the afternoon a few of us returned to Mount Nahu for another chance at the cuckoo. This time we were in luck, with four of us getting great views of perched birds. By the end of the day, we had all seen this elusive bird, and most of us had had great views.

We had just enough time on our last morning to have one final look at the Kuhl's Lorikeets and Rimatara Reed Warblers in the garden, and then we were off on the long journey home. The flight back to Tahiti involved a stopover on the hilly island of Rurutu, another of the Austral Islands, but by 11.30, we were back in Papeete, at the end of the tour. It had been a great adventure; we had managed to get to wherever we had wanted to go; we had seen everything we had expected to see, plus a little bit more; and we had had a jolly good time!

Many thanks to Greg Homel (birdingadventures@mac.com), Jacqui Licht, Shaul Licht and Phil Tizzard for allowing me to use the excellent selection of photos that brighten up this report!



The Henderson Crake was still reasonably common on Henderson, despite the rats (Greg Homel)

SYSTEMATIC LIST OF SPECIES RECORDED DURING THE TOUR

The species names and taxonomy used in the report mostly follows Gill, F & D Donsker (Eds). **IOC World Bird Names**. This list is updated several times annually and is available at <http://www.worldbirdnames.org>.

Species which were only recorded by the leader are indicated by the symbol (LO).

Species which were not personally recorded by the leader are indicated by the symbol (NL).

Species marked with the diamond symbol (◊) are either endemic to the country or local region or considered 'special' birds for some other reason (e.g. it is only seen on one or two Birdquest tours; it is difficult to see across all or most of its range; the local form is endemic or restricted-range and may in future be treated as a full species).

Conservation threat categories and information are taken from *Threatened Birds of the World*, BirdLife International's magnificent book on the sad status of the rarest 10% of the world's avifauna, and updates on the BirdLife website: <http://www.birdlife.org/datazone/home>

C = Critically endangered, **E** = Endangered, **V** = Vulnerable, **NT** = Near threatened.

Pacific Black Duck (Grey D) *Anas superciliosa* Three in Papenoo Valley and at least 11 on Rimatara.

Red Junglefowl *Gallus gallus* Common in the Marquesas, Tahiti and Rimatara, but not all were 'wild'!

Albatross sp. (NL) One seen way off in the distance between 40 Mile Reef and Henderson Island.

Murphy's Petrel ◊ *Pterodroma ultima* (NT) Breeding in large numbers on Oeno and the commonest petrel at sea.

Juan Fernandez Petrel ◊ *Pterodroma exilis* (V) A total of 41 logged at sea, mostly flying southeast. See Note.

Kermadec Petrel ◊ *Pterodroma neglecta* About 15, mostly in Pitcairn waters and especially around Oeno.

Herald Petrel ◊ *Pterodroma heraldica* About 20, mostly amongst the Pitcairn Islands. See Note.

Henderson Petrel ◊ (H Island P) *Pterodroma atrata* (E) About 80 at 40 Mile Reef and off Henderson Island.

Phoenix Petrel ◊ *Pterodroma alba* (E) A total of 10 were logged, including three over Oeno.

Cook's Petrel *Pterodroma cookii* (NL) (V) One was seen by Greg between the Gambiers and Pitcairn.

Stejneger's Petrel ◊ *Pterodroma longirostris* (V) One passed close by the ship off Henderson Island.

Tahiti Petrel ♦ *Pseudobulweria rostrata* (NT) Two on the way to Fatu Hiva and 13 on the way back from Oeno.



Herald Petrel (Phil Tizzard) and Tahiti Petrel (Greg Homel) were both seen well at sea

White-chinned Petrel *Procellaria aequinoctialis* (V) One between the Gambiers and Pitcairn.

Black Petrel ♦ (Parkinson's P) *Procellaria parkinsoni* (V) 5 amongst the Pitcairn Is. and 2 en route to the Gambiers.

Wedge-tailed Shearwater *Puffinus pacificus* 12 between Hiva Oa and Fatu Hiva, and four in the Gambiers.

Christmas Shearwater ♦ (C Island S) *Puffinus nativitatis* Five at Oeno, 40 at Motu Teiku and a couple at sea.

Tropical Shearwater ♦ *Puffinus bailloni* 12 coming in to Motu Teiku in the evening, and six at sea in the Gambiers.

Bulwer's Petrel *Bulweria bulwerii* 40 on the way out to Fatu Hiva and 20 on the way back to Hiva Oa.

White-bellied Storm Petrel ♦ *Fregetta grallaria* Three sightings of single birds at sea. See Note.

Polynesian Storm Petrel ♦ *Nesofregetta fuliginosa* (E) Close but brief views of one on our first full day at sea.

Red-tailed Tropicbird *Phaethon rubricauda* Common in the Pitcairn Islands and Tuamotus; also two at Rimatara.

White-tailed Tropicbird *Phaethon lepturus* Fairly common in the Marquesas and Tahiti; also two at Rimatara.

Striated Heron (Little H) *Butorides striata* (NL) One seen by Greg in the grounds of our hotel in Tahiti.

Pacific Reef Heron (P R Egret) *Egretta sacra* A few in all the Marquesas, Tahiti, the Tuamotus and Rimatara.

Great Frigatebird *Fregata minor* Much the commonest frigatebird, breeding in the Pitcairn Islands and Tuamotus.



Pacific Reef Egret (Derek Scott) and Great Frigatebird (Shaul Licht) were widespread amongst the islands

Lesser Frigatebird *Fregata ariel* Small numbers in the Marquesas, one on Oeno and one on Morane Atoll.

Masked Booby ♦ *Sula dactylatra* Breeding commonly in the Pitcairn Islands and on Tenararo and Morane atolls.

Red-footed Booby *Sula sula* A few in the Marquesas; breeding commonly in the Pitcairn Islands and Tuamotus.

Brown Booby *Sula leucogaster* A few in the Marquesas, one on Oeno, and fairly common in the Gambiers.

Swamp Harrier *Circus approximans* One at the hotel and one at the airport on Tahiti – an introduced species.

Spotless Crake ♦ *Porzana tabuensis* (LO) One at the brackish lagoon on Oeno – sadly seen only by the leader!

Henderson Crane ♦ (H Island C) *Porzana atra* (V) Superb views of about 15 on Henderson Island.

Pacific Golden Plover *Pluvialis fulva* 1 on Hiva Oa, 1 on Henderson, 1 on Oeno, 2 on Tenararo and 1 on Tahiti.

Bristle-thighed Curlew ♦ *Numenius tahitiensis* (V) Over 50 recorded, mainly in the Pitcairn Islands and Tuamotus.

Wandering Tattler *Tringa incana* Small numbers on virtually every island that we visited. We logged about 50.

Tuamotu Sandpiper ♦ *Prosobonia parvirostris* (E) Well over 50 on Tenararo, but only a few on Morane.



Tuamotu Sandpipers were everywhere – in the coconuts (Derek Scott) and in the flowers (Greg R.Homel/birdingadventures@mac.com)

Sanderling *Calidris alba* Two on the beach at Oeno – a scarce visitor to the Pitcairn Islands.

Pectoral Sandpiper *Calidris melanotos* One at the airport on Hiva Oa – a scarce visitor to French Polynesia.

Brown Noddy *Anous stolidus* Rather scarce in the Marquesas, but common bird on all the other islands.

Black Noddy ♦ *Anous minutus* Locally common in the Marquesas, Pitcairn Islands and Tuamotus.

Blue Noddy ♦ (Blue Ternlet) *Procelsterna cerulea* Fairly common in the Marquesas; also two in the Gambiers.

Grey Noddy ♦ (Grey Ternlet) *Procelsterna albivitta* Eight around Pitcairn and at least 12 on Henderson.

Common White Tern ♦ (C Fairy T) *Gygis alba* Common everywhere except in the Marquesas.



Brown Noddy (Shaul Licht) and Common White Tern chick (Derek Scott)

Little White Tern (L Fairy T) ♦ *Gygis microrhyncha* Many great views in the Marquesas, where it was common.

Greater Crested Tern *Thalasseus bergii* A few in Tahiti, the Gambier Islands and the Tuamotus.

Spectacled Tern ♦ (Grey-backed T) *Onychoprion lunatus* One on the way to Fatu Hiva and one off Tahuata.

Sooty Tern *Onychoprion fuscatus* Recorded in the Marquesas, on Oeno (small colony) and in the Tuamotus.

Rock Dove *Columba livia* An introduced species, common in the Marquesas and on Tahiti; also seen on Mangareva.

Zebra Dove *Geopelia striata* An introduced species, common on Tahiti and all of the Marquesas except Fatu Hiva.

Polynesian Ground Dove ♦ *Gallicolumba erythroptera* (C) At least 15 on Tenararo Atoll, mostly males.

Grey-green Fruit Dove ♦ *Ptilinopus purpuratus* 10 in Papehue Valley and two in Papenoo Valley on Tahiti.

Atoll Fruit Dove ♦ *Ptilinopus coralensis* (NT) At least 20 on Tenararo Atoll, where exceptionally tame.

White-capped Fruit Dove ♦ *Ptilinopus dupetithouarsii* Common on all of the Marquesas that we visited.

Henderson Fruit Dove ♦ (H Island F D) *Ptilinopus insularis* (V) At least 12 on Henderson Island.

Marquesan Imperial Pigeon ♦ (Nukuhiva P) *Ducula galeata* (E) At least 20 on Nuku Hiva.

Pacific Long-tailed Cuckoo ♦ (L-t Koel) *Urodynamis taitensis* At least five individuals on Rimatara.

Tahiti Swiftlet ♦ *Aerodramus leucophaeus* At least 100 in Papehue Valley, Tahiti, mostly near a breeding colony.

Marquesan Swiftlet ♦ *Aerodramus ocistus* Common on Nuku Hiva, Ua Huka and Tahuata, and a few on Hiva Oa.

Society Kingfisher ♦ (Tahiti K) *Todiramphus veneratus* Two in Papehue Valley and one in Papenoo Valley, Tahiti.

Marquesan Kingfisher ♦ *Todiramphus godeffroyi* (V) Six on Tahuata, including a pair at their nest-hole.

Kuhl's Lorikeet ♦ (Rimatara Lorikeet) *Vini kuhlii* (E) Common on Rimatara, where we saw well over 100.

Stephen's Lorikeet ♦ *Vini stepheni* (V) At least 10 on Henderson Island.

Ultramarine Lorikeet ♦ *Vini ultramarina* (E) Fairly common on Ua Huka, where we saw at least 30.

Tahiti Monarch ♦ *Pomarea nigra* (C) Five in Papehue Valley, Tahiti, including a pair at the nest.

Iphis Monarch ♦ *Pomarea iphis* (V) Fairly common on Ua Huka, where we found about 25 in Pahatava Valley.

Fatu Hiva Monarch ♦ *Pomarea whitneyi* (C) A pair at the nest and a pair with a juvenile on Fatu Hiva.

Red-vented Bulbul *Pycnonotus cafer* An introduced species; common on Tahiti and also seen on Nuku Hiva.

Pacific Swallow *Hirundo tahitica* Ten in Papehue Valley and one in Papenoo Valley, Tahiti. See Note.

Northern Marquesan Reed Warbler ♦ *Acrocephalus percernis* Common on Nuku Hiva and Ua Huka. See Note.

Tahiti Reed Warbler ♦ *Acrocephalus caffer* (E) Five, including two of the dark morph, in Papenoo Valley, Tahiti.

Southern Marquesan Reed Warbler ♦ *Acrocephalus mendanae* Common on Fatu Hiva, Hiva Oa and Tahuata.



Northern Marquesan Reed Warbler on Nuku Hiva (left, Derek Scott) and Southern Marquesan Reed Warbler on Fatu Hiva (Phil Tizzard)

Rimatara Reed Warbler ♦ *Acrocephalus rimitarae* (V) Very common and conspicuous on Rimatara. See Note.

Henderson Reed Warbler ♦ (H Island R W) *Acrocephalus taiti* (V) Common on Henderson Island. See Note.

Pitcairn Reed Warbler ♦ *Acrocephalus vaughani* (E) Common on Pitcairn Island. See Note.

Silvereye *Zosterops lateralis* An introduced bird, common in the forest on Tahiti and also seen on Rimatara.

Common Myna *Acridotheres tristis* A common and conspicuous introduced species on Hiva Oa and Tahiti.

Common Waxbill *Estrilda astrild* An introduced species, seen at the hotel on Tahiti and also on Ua Huka.

Red-browed Finch (R-b Firetail) *Neochmia temporalis* A few of this exotic on Ua Huka, Hiva Oa, Tahuata and Tahiti.

Chestnut-breasted Mannikin *Lonchura castaneothorax* A common exotic in the Marquesas, Tahiti and Rimatara.

Crimson-backed Tanager *Ramphocelus dimidiatus* Yet another introduced species, seen at our hotel in Tahiti.



A young Humpback Whale put on a wonderful show to round off our day at Henderson Island (Phil Tizzard)

MAMMALS

Polynesian Rat *Rattus* Recorded on Hiva Oa, Tahuata, Tahiti, Henderson, Mangareva and Rimatara.

House Rat (Black R) *Rattus rattus* Recorded on Fatu Hiva, Hiva Oa and Mangareva.

Humpback Whale *Megaptera novaeangliae* Fabulous views of two off Henderson, and also one off Tenararo.

Unidentified whale A beaked whale seen between the Gambiers and Pitcairn was probably Blainville's.

Pantropical Spotted Dolphin *Stenella attenuate* A school of 15 on the crossing to Fatu Hiva.

Spinner Dolphin (Long-beaked S D) *Stenella longirostris* Four off Fatu Hiva and 50 in Tahiti lagoon.

Feral Goat *Capra hircus* 10 on Makaroa and five on Mangareva in the Gambier Islands.



The tiny atoll of Oeno in the Pitcairn Islands (Derek Scott)

NOTES TO THE SYSTEMATIC LIST

Juan Fernandez Petrel *Pterodroma exilis*

The timing of our voyage obviously coincided with the return migration of these petrels to their breeding grounds in the Juan Fernandez archipelago, as none was recorded during this tour in September 2010. Most of the birds we saw were flying rapidly in a south-easterly direction and showed no interest in the ship.

Herald Petrel *Pterodroma heraldica*

It has recently been proposed that Herald Petrel *P. heraldica*, Henderson Petrel *P. atrata* and Trindade Petrel *P. arminjoniana* (of the Atlantic) should be treated as separate species. If so, Herald Petrel becomes monomorphic, as all of the supposed dark morphs of Herald Petrel are clustered around Henderson Island and can be assigned to Henderson Petrel. It is interesting to note that no dark birds have been found in the very large breeding colony of Herald Petrels on Ducie Island, although a few pairs of light Herald Petrels breed on Henderson.

White-bellied Storm Petrel *Fregetta grallaria*

The form that we were most likely to encounter was *titan*, which is known to breed only on Rapa Island in the Austral Islands. This form is much larger in size than other forms of the White-bellied Storm Petrel and may constitute a distinct species. The first bird that we saw between Henderson and Oeno certainly appeared to be larger than a 'normal' White-bellied Storm Petrel.

Pacific Swallow *Hirundo tahitica*

The form occurring in Tahiti is the nominate form *tahitica* which is much darker than other forms and has a peculiar flight. There have been suggestions that it may be a distinct species, but more study is required.

Northern Marquesan Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus percernis*

This species was formerly lumped with Southern Marquesan Reed Warbler in the Marquesan Reed Warbler *A. mendanae*. We saw two of the four forms of the Northern Marquesan Reed Warbler, *percernis* on Nuku Hiva and *idae* on Ua Huka.

Southern Marquesan Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus mendanae*

Following the splitting off of the *percernis* group as the Northern Marquesan Reed Warbler, this species now includes only four forms, two of which we saw: *fatuhivae* of Fatu Hiva and *mendanae* on Hiva Oa and Tahuata.

Rimatara Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus rimitarae*

Henderson Reed Warbler (H Island R W) *Acrocephalus taiti*

Pitcairn Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus vaughani*

These three species were formerly lumped in Pitcairn Reed Warbler *A. vaughani*. All three species show a considerable degree of leucism. From our observations, it seems that this trait is much commoner in the reed warblers on Pitcairn and Rimatara than in those on Henderson, with some of the birds on Pitcairn being almost wholly buffy white.



The R.V. Braveheart off Henderson Island (Derek Scott)

BIRD OF THE TRIP

1	Tuamotu Sandpiper	44 points	9 lists
2	Henderson Crake	31	8
3	Ultramarine Lorikeet	11	4
4=	Polynesian Ground Dove	10	4
4=	Kuhl's Lorikeet	10	4
6=	Polynesian Storm Petrel	5	2
6=	White-bellied Storm Petrel	5	2
8	Common White Tern	5	1
9=	Fatu Hiva Monarch	4	2
9=	Chestnut-breasted Mannikin	4	2
11=	Marquesan Imperial Pigeon	4	1
11=	Atoll Fruit Dove	4	1
13	Tahiti Monarch	3	2
14	Murphy's Petrel	3	1
15	Juan Fernandez Petrel	2	2



Matt and his crew often went fishing while the rest of us were ashore (Jacqui Licht)