King Penguin: A breeding colony of several thousand birds on Macquarie Island, a world class experience for any birder, photographer or naturalist.
Introduction: This is undoubtedly the finest seabirding trip on Earth. The statistics simply don’t lie! The Subantarctic Islands, sandwiched between the great white continent and New Zealand and Australia, have an identity of their own, and they are packed to the rafters with penguins, albatrosses and petrels, as well as several endemic landbirds and fascinating marine mammals. In November 2011 Keith Barnes was lucky enough to venture onto the remarkable boat, the Spirit of Enderby, for Tropical Birding’s inaugural experience of this remarkable wilderness area. This trip is not really about numbers. It is about amazing wilderness experiences. But here are some impressive numbers regardless. We tallied some 42 species of tubenose seabirds, including all 14 forms of albatross available and 24 species of shearwater, petrel and prion, as well as 9 species of penguin and 10 shags! We also saw three Taiko’s, the Critically Endangered Magenta Petrel (one of six Pterodromas on the trip) that is estimated to number a grand total of 150 odd individuals. In terms of endemics we also fared exceptionally well, with 15 local seabirds and penguins, 6 endemic shags and 20 landbird and shorebird taxa restricted to these remote islands. In addition, these remote archipelagos are a nexus for threatened birds, and we saw some 46 species represented in BirdLife International’s Red data list. That is a serious quality selection of birds. But like I said, this trip is not about numbers, but about experiences.

An ultimate lifetime experience is spending time with breeding ‘Great Albatrosses’” (Will Carter)
Our day on Enderby Island will go down as one of the finest in my life. Our first experience of life on a Subantarctic Island. The Hooker’s Sea-Lions marauding along the beach were superb value and then the view of the mouse-like Subantarctic Snipe followed by nesting Giant Petrels was phenomenal. Macquarie Island revealed thousands of King Penguins packed together, their chicks begging from them while they craned their necks skywards in a nuptial display. A mixed party of Giant Petrels dismembering a seal pup carcass, blood forming crimson hoods over their heads was equally impressive. Gentoo Penguins waddling past giant proboscis-endowed elephant seals, and the high piping calls of Light-mantled Sooty Albatrosses flying in a parallel display flight against the high cliffs, hanging like pterodactyls, and eyeing you with their Siamese-cat faces are memories never to be forgotten (below).

Campbell Island also yielded two lifetime experiences with the same species. At first we thought that a Southern Royal Albatross, floating on the windless lagoon, was waterlogged, but further investigation revealed that it was being eaten alive, from underneath, by a Sea-lion. The drama played out over a 10 minute spell as the marauding pinniped returned for renewed attacks as the albatross clacked its bill helplessly before succumbing to a massive hit by the seal. As the primary breeding area for these birds we also enjoyed a fabulous few hours watching pairs courting, spreading their wings, pointing the beaks skywards and bill-clacking before canoodling and nibbling each-other’s necks in a very romantic scene. Finishing that off with seeing Campbell Island Teal, a Critically Endangered duck seen by fewer than 200 people, was amazing and unexpected to say the least. The huge colonies of breeding Salvin's Albatrosses on the Bounties, and striking Chatham Albatross on the Pyramid were awe-inspiring, as were the spectacular colonies of breeding Erect Crested and Snares Crested Penguins. Our time on
the Chatham’s was also spent chasing endemic shorebirds like the scarce but spectacular Shore Plover and Chatham Island Oystercatcher. Phenomenal photo opportunities abounded, and frequently one just had to be strict and stop yourself from shooting so as not to over guild the lily. Most birds on land were ridiculously approachable, and those seen on the sea were super photogenic too, often coming within an arms-length of the ship. With good reason these remote islands are called the “Galapagos of the Southern Ocean”, though if anything, with the sheer variety of opportunities possible, they eclipse that description. Those paying attention on deck while sailing between the islands were also treated to an impressive cetacean show, as we saw 6 species including Fin and Gray’s Beaked Whales. These types of trips are often described in a cliché way as “Once in a lifetime trips”. The problem is, that once you go on one, your desire to go back is stronger than it was before you went initially. This is without doubt one of the most incredible trips to one of the most remarkable of Earth’s dwindling wilderness areas. In collaboration with the Heritage Expeditions team, Tropical Birding will be offering several trips through this region from 2012. Please stay updated as booking with Tropical Birding will not cost you a cent more than booking directly with Heritage and there are bunch of advantages to doing it this way, including getting your own dedicated guide if the tour numbers reach 8 participants and also be enjoying the pre and post-tour options we offer.

The spectacular Pacific (Buller’s) Molymawk dives onto some chum behind our boat in the Chatham Islands group.
**Itinerary:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Location</th>
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<tr>
<td>29-31 October</td>
<td>Christchurch - Arthur’s Pass - Invercargill</td>
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<td>1 November</td>
<td>Depart Bluff</td>
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<td>2 November</td>
<td>Snares Islands, New Zealand</td>
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<td>3 November</td>
<td>Enderby Island, Auckland Islands New Zealand</td>
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<td>4 November</td>
<td>Carnley Harbour, Auckland Islands – Macquarie Island, Australia</td>
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<td>5 November</td>
<td>At sea</td>
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<tr>
<td>6-7 November</td>
<td>Macquarie Island, Australia</td>
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<tr>
<td>8 November</td>
<td>At sea</td>
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<td>9 November</td>
<td>Campbell Island, New Zealand</td>
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<td>10 November</td>
<td>At Sea</td>
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<td>11 November</td>
<td>Antipodes Island, New Zealand</td>
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<td>12 November</td>
<td>Bounty Islands, New Zealand</td>
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<td>13 November</td>
<td>Pyramid Rock, Chatham’s Group, New Zealand</td>
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<td>14 November</td>
<td>Southeast Island, Chatham’s Group, New Zealand</td>
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<tr>
<td>15 November</td>
<td>Chatham Island, Chatham’s Group, New Zealand</td>
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<tr>
<td>16-18 November</td>
<td>Steam to Dunedin</td>
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**ISLAND LOG**

Rather than do a daily log it made more sense to treat this trip as an island to island experience with the excursions on each stop detailed instead.

**29 – 30 October: Christchurch and Arthur’s Pass.** After landing in Christchurch we made a quick jaunt up into the nearby Arthur’s Pass region to connect with some of ‘mainland’ New Zealand’s better known bird species. It rained a lot and we were slowed down as a result, but we did connect with a few great birds, most notably the amazing Kea and sleek Blue Duck. We also nailed some other great species though including New Zealand Falcon, Brown Creeper, Tui, Grey Warbler, Tomtit, New Zealand Pigeon, Bellbird, New Zealand Pipit, and a variety of introduced things like Blackbird, Starling, Chaffinch, Greenfinch, Goldfinch, Yellowhammer, Magpie and Skylark. At night we heard but did not see the amazing Greater Spotted Kiwi. On our return to Christchurch we bumped into some widespread species like White-faced Heron, Paradise Shelduck and Australasian Shoveller, Great Cormorants and Royal Spoonbill. Fields held Masked Lapwing, South Island Pied Oystercatcher, Purple Swamphen, Black-billed and Kelp Gulls.
The spectacular Kea (above) and Paradise Shelduck (below) were New Zealand endemics that we were very glad to catch up with on our day out of Christchurch in the spectacular Arthur’s Pass.
31 October: Christchurch – Invercargill. Invercargill is reminiscent of a slightly remote outpost in the Outer Hebrides, and the people shake hands firmly, and bark a loud welcome. However the lamb is still some of the finest on Earth and our collective crew on the vessel ‘The Spirit of Enderby’ soon assembled for our first meeting and briefing in the nice hotel. Our voyage leader Rodney Russ gave us info on the remote set of islands that we would be visiting, the Snares, the Auckland Islands, Macquarie Island, Campbell Island, the Antipodes Islands, the Bounty Islands and the Chatham Islands. Rodney has dubbed these the Galapagos of the southern Ocean, and they do provide an experience that is at least the equal of those famous tropical Ecuadorian jewels – especially for seabird aficionados.

1 November: Invercargill – Bluff and departure. Before departure from Invercargill, we enjoyed the splendors of the Southland Museum, where we could enjoy the displays and exhibits of all the things we might be seeing over the next fortnight. The weather was a suitable blustery mizzle, which got us into the mood immediately for what lay ahead. After passport clearance and luggage checking we drove the short distance to Bluff Harbour and with mounting excitement boarded the Professor Khromov (renamed as Spirit of Enderby by our New Zealand tour operator). We set sail in the late afternoon. Although some people settled in several of us were on deck because this narrow stretch just out of Bluff is a great place to see the southern nominate subspecies of Buller’s Albatross. Those that persisted in the poor weather were rewarded with three individuals of this species/subspecies, the only views of the trip. We also managed out only looks at a nearby Fiordland Crested Penguin (a write in) along with a single surprise but welcome Southern Fulmar and one Hutton’s Shearwater. So all in all a wonderful start. We also enjoyed our first White-capped and Salvin’s Albatrosses, Sooty Shearwaters, a single White-chinned Petrel, many Cape Pigeons, Northern Giant Petrels, Fairy Prions, White-faced Storm-petrels and Common Diving Petrels, Stewart Island and Spotted Shags, and two Blue Penguins. However, pretty soon the excitement was over and we retired below decks for our first of several ‘roly-poly’ meals as the boat rocked too-and-fro as we had our dinner.

It did not take us long before we started racking up great seabirds like this Broad-billed Prion
2 November: Snares – Auckland Islands. We had arrived off the main island in the Snares group by early the next morning and immediately after breakfast boarded the ship’s zodiacs for a close-up look at these islands, reknown for their huge breeding colonies of seabirds, notably Sooty Shearwaters. Rather rough seas and the staunch east wind made life difficult, but thanks to our experienced expedition team we were able to explore the sheltered bays and coves of the main island. The Snares are a strict nature reserve, where ordinary tourists are not allowed to land, so we had to do all our exploring from the boat. The star attractions here were the endemic Snares Crested Penguins which we were able to approach closely as they came ashore on the rocks. Other common birds here included Cape Pigeons of the relatively dark Subantarctic australis race, Subantarctic Skuas, Red-billed Gulls and Antarctic Terns. A group of Little Pied Cormorants were a big surprise and possibly the first ever sighting on these islands. We also managed to spot several Tomtits of the all-black race unique to the Snares, and some Fernbirds, also of an endemic race. We left the Snares before noon and continued south towards the Auckland Islands enjoying good sea-watching on the way, with many Southern Royal, and our first Gibson’s and Wandering Albatrosses, good numbers of Campbell, Salvin’s, White-capped, and Buller’s Albatrosses, hundreds of Sooty Shearwaters, some Mottled, White-chinned, Common Diving and Northern Giant Petrels, many Fairy, Antarctic and Broad-billed Prions and our first Grey-backed and Black-bellied Storm-petrels.

The snazy Snares Crested Penguin is one of the stars here, which is no great surprise when you see how cute they are.
The Hooker’s Sea-Lion is the pinniped version of a Bull-terrier. They were quite approachable at the Snares.

3 + 4 November: Auckland Islands. Over the next couple of days we were to enjoy idyllic times on Enderby Island, where we spent the better part of a day, as well as in Carnley Bay (where weather was so poor that we didn’t bother to land). Our full day on Enderby was amazing, with every possible experience one could hope for on a Subantarctic Island including blazing sunshine and a furious blizzard all within about 30 minutes of each other! Our landing was a huge amount of fun with boisterous male sea-lions welcoming us rather aggressively. Rodney, our expedition leader kept on reassuring us that they posed no danger, but you could see most participants not taking that as gospel when a male charged at them with fish-stained teeth bared and mouth wide open! Stretching our legs through the Rata forests we emerged on a small plateau, where we encountered our first breeding Northern Giant Petrel. After a short walk in the surrounding vegetation we found our only New Zealand ‘Auckland Island’ Snipe. They cooperated beautifully and we all saw them extremely well. Double-banded Plovers and New Zealand Pipits were common and very well behaved. A stunning breeding colony of Light-mantled Sooty Albatross was thoroughly enjoyed. One of the star birds of this trip, there is no doubt ‘old smokie’ with its pale-gray mantle and spectacles stole the hearts there and then. A little further along and we had fabulous encounters with a small colony of Yellow-eyed Penguin. A pair standing high on a cliff overlooking the southern Ocean. Walking to Derry Castle Reef, we worryingly did not encounter the Auckland Island Teal that are usually there, but rather a group of Grey Teal. We needn’t not have panicked as a little later a ridiculously tame pair of Auckland Island Teal paraded gladly for all and sundry while the photographers snapped away at this scarce and local species. Some scrub vegetation a little further on and clumps of Rata forest revealed some Silvereyes, and then we scored Tomtits, Red-crowned Parakeets, and
Tuis. The next feature of this island proved to be a wall of Auckland Island Shags that happened to be in delightful light and we photographed to our hearts content in superb light until it started to snow, then sleet and then gale with horizontal sleet flying directly into your eyes. The next hour was memorable, if not fun. Staggering through the tussock grass into the driving rain was made more entertaining by not being able to see where you were walking. So every now and then a large belch and growl would come from an indignant New Zealand Sea-Lion who’s territory you had accidentally invaded. On my way back I started to worry as I was passing several of the elder boat participants who were too exhausted to walk in the sleet and were looking quite uncomfortable indeed. On reaching the rendezvous point, the sleet storm broke and delightful sun came out. The bedraggled participants slowly streamed back to the boat now fully aware of the changeable nature of weather at the bottom of the world.

The Auckland Island Shag was the first of six endemic shags we saw and they offered us great photo opportunities. They are in fact much better looking than one would believe from looking in the fieldguide.

During the night, we took shelter in Carnley Harbour, between the main island and Adams Island in the south of the Auckland group. By the time we woke up in the morning, there was a stiff wind blowing, and it was snowing. However, the waters were covered by thousands of Sooty Shearwaters, and the spectacle of many thousands of these birds made up for the unfriendly conditions. It soon became apparent that we would not be able to make a landing to
visit the White-capped Albatross colony at South West Cape. Some folks decided to make a brief landing where precious little was seen.

The Auckland Island’s delivered our first real taste of Subantarctic birding in great style.
Creeping around like a mouse was the New Zealand (Subantarctic) Snipe (top left) and in the Rata trees we found several Red-crowned Parakeet (top right). Double-banded Plover (liddle left) and New Zealand Pipit (middle right) were common on the island, while it’s star resident the flightless Auckland Island Teal (bottom) was found eventually and enjoyed in marvelous sunshine.

The Subantarctic Skua is the quintessential ‘Angry Bird’ of these islands.
We found good numbers of Yellow-eyed Penguins on Auckland Island including two photogenic guys.

5 – 7 November: Macquarie Island. When we awoke we were steaming south meaningfully, and the temperatures outside were noticeably colder. We spent the entire day at sea, and although Salvin’s and White-capped Molymawks had dried up, we started seeing more Campbell’s and our first Grey-headed Albatrosss, which suggested we were certainly reaching southern climes. White-headed Petrel, Subantarctic (Little) Shearwater, and the last of our Southern Fulmars completed our first full day without land. The following morning we awoke with Macquarie looming off the port side of the ship. The weather was choppy, but we started to look for ‘Aussie’ birds off the boat like Macquaries Island Shag, and Light-mantled Sooty Albatrosses, so the hardships were limited. Eventually a call was made to go around to a more sheltered bay to attempt a landing at the ANARE base. Several beachmaster Southern Elephant Seals greeted us, as did a couple of cute Gentoo Penguins. A small colony of the endemic shag kept us entertained while a stunning white-morph Southern Giant-Petrel gorged on the carcass of a seal pup, constantly pulling its head out dripping with blood - fabulous entertainment indeed. We could have soaked this up all day. But before long we were being escorted on a short sortie to some local seabird colonies by Aussie research staff, including a local King Penguin colony. En route we had to tip-toe around several enormous male Southern Elephant Seals. Their bulk and presence is impressive indeed. We located a few Gentoo
Penguins who were cuddling with their chicks, and eventually arrived at the King Penguin colony which was nothing short of spectacular. There can be few experiences in the natural world as cool as standing in a giant colony of Subantarctic Penguins, especially when they are the size of my 7 year old son! We watched for a long time as they canoodled, and called, chicks begged and pairs craned their heads back in an exotic dance that would have made Happy Feet proud. Large chocolate colored youngsters all added to the drama. A climb up to a lookout over the island gave one some perspective, and we saw a Lesser Redpoll, that left the Aussie lister in the boat delighted, and me somewhat bemused (I mean, who looks at a Redpoll when King Penguins are on offer). In addition we fortunately found a single Royal Penguin that was trying to hide on the beach among some King Penguins, and we also saw a small group of Southern Rockhopper Penguins back at the base (our fourth penguin of the morning!). In the afternoon we sailed towards Sandy Bay in anticipation of the next day’s excursion, and the only new addition was a handful of Soft-plumaged Petrels. We approached the massive penguin colony on our boat, but had to admire it from a some distance and unfortunately the weather was too poor to attempt a landing, and we barely managed to drop our Australian guests back at their base before we set off on the next leg of our journey to Campbell Island. Thanks to the strong wind seabirds were active and we saw Blue, Mottled, White-headed, and good numbers of Soft-plumaged Petrels.

Macquarie’s specialties included the cute Gentoo (left) and more robust Southern Elephant Seal (right).
The beach at the ANARE base at Macquarie (top) and the endemic Macquarie Island Shag (bottom)

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A white-morph Southern Giant Petrel scavenges at a seal carcass, reminiscent of a scene on the African savanna (above) and the impressive King Penguin colony at Sandy Bay (bottom).
A white-morph Southern Giant Petrel in flight (above) and a lone endemic Royal Penguin in the King Penguin colony near the ANARE base (bottom)
A hungry King Penguin chick doing his bit to make sure he gets a meal.
8 – 9 November: Campbell Islands. We spent a whole day at sea between Macquarie and Campbell. New species seen included Antipodean and Northern Royal Albatrosses and Kerguelen Petrel, as well as many Campbell, White-capped and Grey-headed Albatrosses, as well as a smattering of great views of Grey-backed and Black-bellied Storm-petrels. The following morning we were moored in Perseverance Bay, ready for our landing. Although some of the members on our boat decided to take a more strenuous trek to NW Bay, most birders were happy to potter around on the scenic boardwalk where we could enjoy the antics of the colony of Southern Royal Albatrosses. En route to the dock, a little zodiac excursion ensured that we saw the world’s loneliest tree. Here we also witnessed a sealion attacking a recently fledged Southern Royal Albatross, which was waterlogged. I wrote this up in an article for Africa Birds and Birding an apparently this is the first time such evidence of seal predation on albatrosses away from the nest has been documented.
Before we reached the dock we saw both Campbell Island Shags and a pair of Campbell Island Teal. The duck is flightless and has only become more habituated to visitors in the last couple of years, and we were probably amongst a few hundred people worldwide to have seen this reclusive species. A large part of the rest of the day was dedicated to the tame, docile and approachable Southern Royal Albatrosses. These photogenic beasts were scattered on the grassy slopes of the island, and offered great photo opportunities. An especially popular target were a pair of albatross that were constantly preening, canoodling and talking to each other. Other birds flew overhead calling. A walk to the far end of the island produced an opportunity for some dramatic landscape photography. As we returned to the dock, the teals reappeared and even allowed themselves to be photographed.
The incredibly rare Campbell Island Teal (above) and the remarkable windswept scenery of this island group were two of the day’s outstanding features.
But the day was really about Southern Royal Albatrosses. Breeding birds call, preen and canoodle (above) and another was deftly dispatched on the water by an aggressive Hooker’s Sea-Lion, the first evidence of seals killing albatrosses on the breeding grounds away from the nest.
10-11 November: Antipodes Islands. The next full day was spent at sea between Campbell Islands and the Antipodes. We began to encounter Gray Petrels amongst the more regular seabirds. The following morning the skies were thick with Salvin’s Molymawk as we approached their main breeding grounds, and we located a number of additional Grey Petrels. We reached the Antipodes, a barren outcrop replete with cliffs. Getting in and out of the zodiacs was a challenge as the wind and waves were high, but we were grateful for the opportunity to look for the key birds here. It did not take long to find Erect-crested Penguin, and I was in one of the lucky boats that located the local endemic Antipodes Island Parakeet, which only a few people managed to see.

The delightful Erect Crested Penguin was a highlight today and a cause of celebration for several penguin tickers for whom it was the ‘last’ world penguin.

12 November: Bounty Islands. Overnight we steamed towards the Bounty Islands, reaching this strange collection of virtually vegetation-less islands in the mid-morning. Another boat was there! It turned out to be a research vessel, with some scientists on board that Rodney knew from New Zealand. It seemed that virtually every square inch of the Bounties was covered in

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breeding sea-birds and fur seals. Soon we were loaded in the zodiacs and spinning around the islands here looking at many Fulmar Prions, unusually for a prion they visit their cliff nesting sites by day, Salvin's Mollymawks, of which over 30,000 pairs are estimated to breed here, and more Erect-crested Penguins, and the endemic Bounty Island Shag, one of the world's rarest cormorants. Some participants even managed to see a Leopard Seal. As we were departing these waters, Adam (one of the onboard staff) was given the unenviable task of chumming. It worked a treat! As he lobbed rotten fish heads into the water a hundred or so magical Salvin’s Albatross followed the boat and fought for scraps, creating great photo opportunities. In the afternoon we continued our cruise towards the Chatham Islands. We were now approaching the main area of occurrence of the extremely rare Magenta Petrel. The excitement was getting palpable, as many people regard this as the pièce de résistance of this trip. We watched, waited and hoped, but went to bed empty handed.

The very scarce Bounty Island Shag (above) and a group of porpoising Erect Crested Penguins (below).
Fulmar Prion (above) and an immaculate Salvin’s Albatross (below)
Salvin’s Albatrosses squabble over chum (above) and a Northern Giant-Petrel bathes in the bay (below)
Salvin’s Albatrosses gather behind the boat as we are steaming away from the Bounty Island’s, where most of their world population breeds.

13 – 15 November: Chatham Island group. The Magenta Petrel vigil had started early this morning, and before long a quiet and concentrated deck all focused on looking for Pterodromas had assembled. This area had been key in the past, with all records of this species at sea coming from this stretch. It surely was not a lack of search effort, and we did log some other fabulous new Pterodromas including Cook’s and Grey-faced Petrels, and some old friends in the form of White-headed, Soft-plumaged and Mottled Petrels, but through the morning and the afternoon, no Taiko was to be seen. As the afternoon wore on we located our first magical ashy-headed Chatham Mollymawk and the Chatham breeding subspecies of Pacific (Buller’s) Mollymawk, and a few Gibson’s and Antipodean Albatrosses. Although we had dipped Taiko, we enjoyed the late afternoon spectacle of Pyramid Rock, a single outcrop with the World’s entire population of Chatham Mollymaws breeding on it! This is an amazing and privileged moment in itself. The chumming session was a repeat of our Bounties experience, with vast numbers of both Chatham and Pacific Mollymawks coming within touching distance, and the photographers were just in ecstasy.
Pacific (Buller’s) Albatross (above) and ‘ashy-headed’ Chatham Island Albatross (below) are both entirely restricted to the Chatham’s group as breeding species.
We eventually dropped anchor, only to be told that hundreds of tubenoses were circling the
boat, attracted to the lights. In particular it was looks in the hand of the White-faced and Gray-
backed Storm-Petrels that most people liked. To feel how delicate and dainty these birds are in
the face of the dramatic storms we had just passed though made us all relaize that these
seabirds are little marvels. The following morning we readied ourselves for a zodiac expedition
around Southeast Island. Although Black Robin’s are here we had little chance of seeing this
mega rarity, but we had several encounters with the scarce and endangered dapper little Shore
Plover. We also saw some phenomenally pretty Pitt Island Shags and Chatham Island Red-
crowned Parakeet. Suddenly there was a pod of Common Bottlenose Dolphins all around us,
and we all enjoyed the experience of having these beautiful animals surface virtually under our
boats. A pair of Little Blue Penguins was another addition to our growing penguin list. Later we
worked Mangere and Little Mangere Islands, where despite the ferocious swell we managed to
see the amazingly scarce Chatham Island Oystercatcher (around 300 individuals remain), as
well as the scarce Forbe’s Parakeet. We started heading towards towards the main Chatham
Island and its capital Waitangi. As luck would have it, I had just finished a shower (having being
cold and drenched after the zodiac trips), when a intercom announcement said “Magenta Petrel
from the bridge”. I dropped everything and ran to the bow (which was closer than the bridge),
without any shoes on. Standing on the bow of a boat, without shoes on is not smart – but then,
or is missing a Magenta Petrel. However, the bird was gone…… I headed for the bridge (still
shoeless), and smarting a little bit at maybe the dip of the trip. But then, along with another 50
happy people, the bird was found again, and there was much relief and celebration all around
the boat. But the best was still to come when 20 minutes later a third bird appeared virtually on
the bow and banked and arced high into the sky and everyone could be sure that they had had
an incredible (and unlikely never to be repeated) moment, stellar point-blank views of one of the
finest seabirds on the planet! It is safe to say that there was much celebration on the ship that
night, and I think the bar did some roaring trade.

The following morning we were moored in the bay looking at Waitangi, the capital of the
Chatham Islands. It was the first sign of civilization for a fortnight, and quite an eyesore. Much of
the Chatham’s have been modified irrevocably for pasture and crops, but some local
landowners have done a great job at looking after a stretch and protected it as a private nature reserve at Awatotra. Their foresight is appreciated as this is one of the few places where native wildlife still survives and even thrives. It did not take us long to find the two main endemic species in the forest, the Chatham Island Pigeon (Parea) and Chatham Island Warbler. However there are a few other endemic subspecies here and it was fun to be birding closed habitat again after two weeks of scanning. We found New Zealand Fantail, Red-crowned Parakeet, Tui and Weka (the subspecies introduced from the Canterbury plains). We stopped by the pub and I ordered some ‘fush and chups’ and a few pints of lager on dry land before we walked back to the port for our return trip to the ship.

Juvenile Chatham Island Warbler (above) and Parea (below) were found at Awatotra.
16 – 18 November: Westward bound. It would be quite a few days before we would see dry land again, as we steamed towards Dunedin from the Chatham’s group. As we departed we had thousands of small prions and also hundreds of White-faced Storm-petrels heading against strong wind in front of the boat. Heading back towards New Zealand there were still a few key birds to look for and we soon started adding greater numbers of Cook’s, Gray-faced and White-chinned Petrels. The following day produced more views of the same birds, and we lapped these up as we began to prepare to say good-bye to southern Oceans birding at its finest. The only new species we added was Buller’s Shearwater, which we saw in decent numbers. A few cetaceans were spotted on the route into NZ, including fabulous views (for some) of two breaching Southern Bottlenose Whales. Arriving into Dunedin in the final morning, we cleared the ‘border’ and headed into town. Dunedin is a great town with a good vibe where a good lunch was enjoyed before venturing to the airport, and the end of the trip.

Gray-faced Petrels were a frequent species on our trip back towards Dunedin.

**BIRD LIST**
The nomenclature and base structure follow Clements, J. (6th ed) *Birds of the World. A Checklist*. Pica Press. However, we are more generous in recognizing that many taxa are worthy of redesignation, and these remote islands are evidently a goldmine for future splits. I have written selective taxonomic notes against particular species of note (especially endemics), and also highlighted threatened status according to BirdLife in **Red** bold font.

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SYSTEMATIC LIST

APTERYGIDAE

Great Spotted Kiwi *Apteryx haasti* (HO). Heard only giving it’s strange call at night in the Arhtur’s Pass area. **Vulnerable**

SPHENISCIDAE

King Penguin *Aptenodytes patagonicus*. Amazing encounters with this incredible bird and it’s chicks on Macquarie. Distant views of the enormous colony at Lusitania Bay, which numbers in excess of 100000 birds.

Yellow-eyed Penguin *Megadyptes antipodes*. Great encounters with this looker on Enderby Island, including several photogenic individuals. **Endangered**.

Gentoo Penguin *Pygoscelis papua*. Splendid views of adults and chicks near the ANARE base on Macquarie Island. **Near Threatened**.

Blue Penguin *Eudyptula minor*. Great views of a pair in the Chatham’s group on one of the zodiac cruises.

Southern Rockhopper Penguin *Eudyptes chrysocome*. We got very lucky with a small group of birds near the ANARE base at Macquarie, and a single on the rocks in the Antipodes Islands. Occasionally lumped with Northern Rockhopper Penguin. **Vulnerable**.

Royal Penguin *Eudyptes schlegeli*. Apart from distant views of the huge colony at Sandy Bay, we located one tired and cooperative individual amongst the King Penguins near the ANARE base at Macquarie. Much to everyone’s relief! **Vulnerable**.

Snares Crested Penguin *Eudyptes robustus*. Great looks at the colonies on the Snares including excellent photo ops. **Vulnerable**.

Fiordland Crested Penguin *Eudyptes pachyrhynchus*. A singleton alongside the boat soon after leaving Bluff was a great find. **Vulnerable**.

Erect-crested Penguin *Eudyptes sclateri*. Great looks at the colonies on the Bounty Islands and Antipodes, including excellent photo ops. **Endangered**.

DIOMEDEIDAE

Wandering Albatross (Snowy Albatross) *Diomedea exulans*. A serious ID challenge for anyone, with the increasing recognition of Wandering Albatross taxa as good species and the age related plumages changes in this group, this is far from easy. A handful of definitive Snowy Albatross were seen between the Snares, Auckland Island, and Macquarie Island. **Vulnerable**

Gibson’s Albatross *Diomedea [antipodensis] gibsoni*. The most frequently identified and most common of the ‘Wandering’ albatrosses with sightings throughout the trip, particularly between Macquarie and the Campbell Islands. This form only breeds on the Auckland Island group
where numbers are estimated around 3200 breeding pairs. There is some controversy as to whether this and Antipodean Albatross are good species or are in fact conspecific. Robertson and Nunn (1998) recognized this as a good species, but most other authorities do not, and hence it is included within Antipodean for threatened species status.

**Antipodean Albatross** *Diomedea a. antipodensis*. Between Macquarie and Campbell Islands and predictably near the Antipodes Islands (where they breed), we had decent numbers of this form. It is scarce however with a global population of less than 600 pairs, and when considered conspecific with Gibson’s (above) it is classified as **Vulnerable**.

**Southern Royal Albatross** *Diomedea epomophora*. The commonest great albatross of our cruise being recorded most days. We had intimate encounters with this on Campbell Island, where we watched them breeding. Total population numbers around 8500 pairs. **Vulnerable**.

**Northern Royal Albatross** *Diomedea sanfordi*. Particularly common near the Chatham’s, where over 6000 pairs breed and on our way back to Dunedin, where we even saw some individuals from the famous Tairhoa Head colony as we passed the Otago peninsula. **Endangered**.

**Black-browed Albatross** *Thalassarche melanophris*. We found handfuls of these between the Snares and the Antipodes. Although one of the world’s more common albatrosses with nearly 550,000 pairs it is quite scarce in these waters and it is still heavily threatened by longline fisheries causing a serious decline. **Endangered**.

**Campbell Albatross** *Thalassarche impavid*. We picked up a few hundred of these birds cruising close to Macquarie and the Campbell islands, the latter group being where all 20,000 pairs breed. **Vulnerable**.

**White-capped Albatross** (White-capped Albatross) *Thalassarche cauta steadi*. A common species near the Snares and in small numbers as we headed from the Chatham’s to New Zealand. Mostly considered conspecific *cauta* from Tasmania. These are considered **Near threatened** by BirdLife.

**Salvin’s Albatross** *Thalassarche salvini*. One of the commoner Albatrosses of the cruise, especially abundant near the Bounty Islands where huge numbers breed, numbering around 30000 pairs. **Vulnerable**.

**Chatham Albatross** *Thalassarche eremita*. The stunning ‘Ashy-headed’ Albatross is abundant around the Chatham’s group, where over 5000 pairs (the entire world population) breed on one rock stack but not easily seen elsewhere. **Vulnerable**.

**Grey-headed Albatross** *Thalassarche chrysostoma*. Small numbers were seen between Macquarie, Auckland and Campbell Islands. One of the less common albatrosses of the cruise. **Vulnerable**.

**Buller’s Albatross** *Thalassarche [bulleri] bulleri*. Only noted on the first two days of the cruise with our best views right off Bluff harbor on the first afternoon. They breed at the Snares and Solander Islands. Considered conspecific with the next species by most authorities, but always good to note these taxa. **Near-threatened**.
Pacific Albatross *Thalassarche [bulleri]* spp. Common around the Chatham Islands, where we had great views. Considered conspecific with the previous species by most authorities, but always good to note these taxa. **Near-threatened.**

Light-mantled Sooty Albatross *Phoebetria palpebrata*. ‘Old Smokie’, the most elegant of all the albatrosses, was seen regularly in small numbers in the southern latitudes, particularly around Macquarie. **Near threatened.**

**PROCELLARIIDAE**

Buller’s Shearwater *Puffinus bulleri*. Fairly common between the Chathams and Dunedin.

Sooty Shearwater *Puffinus griseus*. Abundant around the Snares and huge numbers in Carnley Harbour were memorable.

Hutton’s Shearwater *Puffinus huttoni*. Seen shortly after departing from Bluff. Only one of the trip.

Little Shearwater *Puffinus assimilis*. The Subantarctic form *elegans* was uncommon but regular throughout the voyage.

Grey Petrel *Procellaria cinerea*. An uncommon species, but great views of this species in the vicinity of Macquarie. **Near threatened.**

White-chinned Petrel *Procellaria aequinoctialis*. Fairly common and widespread. **Vulnerable.**

Cape Petrel *Daption capensis*. Common, and widespread, particularly of the southern *australe* form. but nominate birds were also seen.

Antarctic Fulmar *Fulmarus glacialisoides*. Scarce, but seen multiple times on the voyage, including some very good looks.

Southern Giant Petrel *Macronectes giganteus*. Uncommon throughout, including some breeding birds with chicks. White morph birds were seen at Macquarie.

Northern Giant Petrel *Macronectes halli*. Much commoner than SGP, and see daily.

Fairy Prion *Pachyptila turtur*. Common in northern waters.

Fulmar Prion *Pachyptila crassirostris*. Seen well in the Bounty Islands, where birds attend their breeding cliffs in broad daylight.

Antarctic Prion *Pachyptila desolata*. Common in southern waters, especially around Macquarie.

Broad-billed Prion *Pachyptila vittata*: Seen well near the Snares for the first time, and then scattered records throughout the cruise. Earns it’s name of Whalebird!
Blue Petrel *Halobaena caerulea*. A handful around Macquarie.

**Cook’s Petrel** *Pterodroma cookii*. Handfuls of these elegant petrels located between the Chathams and Dunedin. **Vulnerable**

**Mottled Petrel** *Pterodroma inexpectata*. Common right from Bluff, and see at various intervals throughout the cruise. **Near threatened**.

**Grey-faced Petrel** *Pterodroma gouldi*. Near the Chathams and on our return to Dunedin, see well and regularly. Often considered conspecific with Great-winged Petrel.

**Kerguelen Petrel** *Pterodroma brevirostris*. Two at sea north of Macquarie.

**White-headed Petrel** *Pterodroma lessonii*. Common and regular visitor to the boat.

**Magenta Petrel** (Taiko) *Pterodroma magenta*. After we thought we had dipped this a magical period followed where 3 of these amazing birds were found, one of them right in front of the boat, and showed magnificently for all to see. World population of 100-150 birds, with 12 known breeding pairs last year. **Critically endangered**.

**Soft-plumaged Petrel** *Pterodroma mollis*. Common and regular visitor to the boat.

**HYDROBATIDAE**

**Wilson’s Storm-petrel** *Oceanites oceanicus*. Handfuls of birds, mostly around Macquarie.

**Grey-backed Storm-petrel** *Oceanites nereis*. Beautiful species, fairly commonly seen throughout cruise.

**White-faced Storm-petrel** *Pelagodroma marina*. Beautiful species, fairly commonly seen throughout cruise.

**Black-bellied Storm-petrel** *Fregetta tropica*. Beautiful species, fairly commonly seen throughout cruise.

**PELECANOIDIDAE**

**Common Diving Petrel** *Pelecanoides urinatrix*: Fairly commonly seen throughout cruise.

**PHALACROCORACIDAE**

**Great Cormorant** *Phalacrocorax carbo*. One in Bluff harbor proved to be the only one of the trip.

**Little Pied Cormorant** *Phalacrocorax melanoleucos*. Found at the Snares, where this was apparently the first record for the species

**Macquarie Shag** *Phalacrocorax purpurascens*. A colony near the ANARE base kept us entertained and good views were had of this localized species. Not recognized by BirdLife.
Stewart Island Shag *Leucocarbo chalconotus*. As we departed Bluff we had good looks at a few of these. **Vulnerable.**

Chatham Island Shag *Leucocarbo onslowi*: This turned out to be a scarce species indeed with only a handful seen in the Chatham’s Group. The sudden decline and realization that this species breeds on only 1 ha and numbers 357 breeding pairs has resulted in its ‘upgrading’ to **Critically endangered.**

Bounty Island Shag *Leucocarbo ranfurlyi*: A few hundred were see from our zodiacs in the Bountys. **Vulnerable.**

Auckland Island Shag *Leucocarbo colensoi*: Superb photo opportunities and views on Enderby. **Vulnerable.**

Campbell Island Shag *Leucocarbo campbelli*: A handful were well seen on Campbell Island. **Vulnerable.**

Spotted Shag *Stictocarbo punctatus*: Some in Bluff Harbour.

Pitt Island Shag *Stictocarbo featherstoni*: Stunning bird of which we had great views off South East Island in the Chatham’s group of this endemic. It’s small population of just 500 pairs combined with its apparent decline resulted in the recent upgrading of this species to **Endangered.**

ARDEIDAE

White-faced Heron *Ardea novaehollandiae*. Near Christchurch.

ANATIDAE

Black Swan *Cygnus atratus*. Near Christchurch.

Paradise Shelduck *Tadorna variegate*. Near Christchurch.

Grey Teal *Anas gibberifrons*. Sixteen on Enderby Island

Blue Duck *Hymenolaimus malacorhynchos*. One of the great finds on our little excursion out of Christchurch and into the central South Island mountains before the tour. **Endangered.**

Auckland Island Teal *Anas aucklandica*: Great looks and excellent photo opportunities on Enderby Island. **Vulnerable.**

Campbell Island Teal *Anas nesiotis*. Two individuals, seen well and photographed at Perseverance Bay on Campbell Island. **Endangered.**

Australasian Shoveler *Anas rhynchotis*. Near Christchurch.

ACCIPITRIDAE

Tropical Birding

www.tropicalbirding.com
**Australasian Harrier** *Circus approximans*: Seen en route to Bluff and also on the Chatham Islands.

**New Zealand Falcon** *Falco novaseelandiae*. Seen well near Arthur’s Pass. Near-threatened

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**RALLIDAE**

**Weka** *Gallirallus australis*. We saw *grayi* in the Arthur’s Pass area and *hectori* that is now extinct on the Canturbury plains occurs on Chatham Islands as an introduced bird, we saw a couple very well at the Awatotra private reserve. Vulnerable.
Australian Swamp-hen (Pukeko) *Porphyrio melanotus*: Near Christchurch and Invercargill.

**HAEMATOPODIDAE**

**South Island Pied Oystercatcher** *Haematopus finschi*. Seen as we returned to port at Dunedin.

**Variable Oystercatcher** *Haematopus unicolor*: A couple near Christchurch and more at Bluff Harbour.

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**Chatham Islands Oystercatcher** *Haematopus chathamensis*. Despite atrocious conditions in a bobbing boat and with heavy swells, we eventually scored these after frustratingly hearing them call from an area that was too dangerous to approach. In the end we had great looks at these incredibly scarce and endangered shorebirds that have global numbers of only some 300 odd individuals. **Endangered.**

**RECURVIROSTRIDAE**

**Pied Stilt** *Himantopus leucocephalus*. Near Christchurch.

**CHARADRIIDAE**

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[www.tropicalbirding.com](http://www.tropicalbirding.com)
**Double-banded Plover** *Charadrius bicinctus*. Great looks at *exilis* the endemic form on Enderby Island.

**Shore Plover** *Thinornis novaeseelandiae*. We located a few of these on South East Island in the Chatham group, where it is one of the most threatened shorebirds on the planet with a global population of 220 birds with 80-odd pairs. The good news is that the population seems to be on the increase. **Endangered.**

**Spur-winged Plover** *Vanellus miles*. Near Christchurch and again on the Chatham Islands.

**SCOLOPACIDAE**

**Ruddy Turnstone** *Arenaria interpres*. Enderby Island.

**New Zealand Snipe** (Subantarctic Snipe) *Coenocorypha aucklandica*. Superb looks at a handful on Enderby Island. **Near-threatened.**

**Bar-tailed Godwit** *Limosa lapponica*. Enderby Island.

**STERCORARIIDAE**

**Subantarctic Skua** *Catharacta Antarctica*. Fairly common throughout the cruise, particularly on the islands.

**LARIDAE**

**Kelp Gull** *Larus dominicanus*. Common and widespread throughout.

**Red-billed Gull** *Larus scopulinus*. Seen around Christchurch and common on several of the island groups.
Black-billed Gull *Larus bulleri*. Seen on some braided rivers as we made our way up to Arthur’s Pass. Massive declines in this species in the last 20 years see it being considered as Endangered.

STERNIDAE

White-fronted Tern *Sterna striata*. A handful in Bluff and again on the Auckland Islands.

Black-fronted Tern *Sterna albostrata*. Seen on a braided river near Arthur’s Pass. Endangered

Antarctic Tern *Sterna vittata*. Seen breeding and courting at the Snares, and also seen at the Aucklands, Macquarie Island, Campbell Island, the Antipodes and the Bounty Islands.

COLUMBIDAE

New Zealand Pigeon *Hemiphaga novaeseelandiae*. A handful of birds at Arthur’s Pass. Near threatened

Chatham Island Pigeon (Parea) *Hemiphaga chathamensis*. Some very tame birds at Awokera allowed close approach, and great views and photographs. Not treated as a good species by many authorities but HANZAB argues convincingly that this is a good species, and it ought to feature in BirdLife’s list of threatened birds.

Rock Dove *Columba livia*. Near Christchurch and Dunedin.

PSITTACIDAE

Kea *Nestor notabilis*. One of the stars of our little excursion to Arthur’s Pass before the tour, we had individuals trying to eat our coffee cups at the top! Vulnerable.

Antipodes Island Parakeet *Cyanoramphus unicolor*. A couple of individuals seen well from zodiacs along the shore of Antipodes Island. Vulnerable

Red-crowned Parakeet *Cyanoramphus novaezelandiae*. The taxonomy of this complex is controversial, and although some authorities suggest that various island races are good species, there is no convincing evidence for such treatment. We saw the nominate race on Enderby Island, Reischek’s Parakeet (*hochstetteri*) on the Antipodes Islands, and Chatham Island Red-crowned Parakeet (*chathamensis*) at Awokera on the main Chatham Islands.

Forbes’s Parakeet *Cyanoramphus forbesi*: Seen from the zodiacs at Mangere Island. Numbering less than 1000 individuals and it is considered to be Endangered.

Yellow-crowned Parakeet *Cyanoramphus auriceps*. Near the base of Arthur’s Pass.

ALAUDIDAE

Eurasian Skylark *Alauda arvensis*. Near Christchurch and on the Chatham Island’s.
HIRUNDINIDAE

**Welcome Swallow** *Hirundo neoxena*. Near Christchurch and on the Chatham Island’s.

MOTACILLIDAE

**New Zealand Pipit** *Anthus novaeseelandiae*. Another group with some complex taxonomy. We saw four taxa. The nominate on the main islands, *chathamensis* on the Chathams, *aucklandicus* on the Aucklands and Campbell, and *steindachneri* on the Antipodes.

PRUNELLIDAE

**Dunnock** *Prunella modularis*. Small numbers on Campbell Island and in the Chathams.

TURDIDAE

**Common Blackbird** *Turdus merula*. Common in Christchurch, Invercargill and Dunedin, and on some of the islands.

**Song Thrush** *Turdus philomelos*. Very common around Invercargill, and Dunedin.

SYLVIIDAE

**Fernbird** *Bowdleria punctate*. Endemic subspecies *caudata* was seen in the Snares, and may be a good species.

PACHYCEPHALIDAE

**New Zealand Creeper** *Mohoua novaeseelandiae*. Seen at the base of Arthur’s Pass.

ACANTHIZIDAE

**Grey Warbler** *Gerygone igata*: A few in Invercargill.

**Chatham Island Warbler** *Gerygone albofrontata*. A bunch of these confiding little warblers seen at Awokera on the main Chatham Island.

MONARCHIDAE

**Grey Fantail** *Rhipidura fuliginosa*. The Chathams Islands form *penitus* was seen.

EOPSALTRIIDAE (PETROICIDAE)

**Tomtit** *Petroica macrocephala*. Yet another species with complex taxonomy, and on our trip we recorded three of the five taxa in this group. There may be a slew of armchair ticks in here! In the Arthur’s Pass area we had the nominate race. The Snare’s endemic *dannefaerdi* were seen well during our zodiac cruise, and is probably highly threatened. We also saw the race *marrineri* in the Auckland Islands.

[www.tropicalbirding.com](http://www.tropicalbirding.com)
The ‘complex’ Tomtit group comprises five races which may all be good species. We saw three on this trip. The South Island Tomtit (top left) was found near Arthur’s Pass, while the rare and all-black
Snare’s Island Tomtit (top right) was seen on our zodiac cruise on the Snares, and we found many Auckland Island Tomtit on our walk around Enderby Island (bottom).

ZOSTEROPIDAE

**Silvereye** *Zosterops lateralis*. Fairly common around Invercargill and seen also on the islands.

MELIPHAGIDAE

**New Zealand Bellbird** *Anthornis melanura*. Seen on Enderby Island.

**Tui** *Prosthemadera novaeseelandiae*. Around Christchurch, a few on Enderby Island and many of the endmic race *chatamensis* on the main island in the Chathams.

FRINGILLIDAE

**Common Chaffinch** *Fringilla coelebs*. Seen on the Chathams.

**European Greenfinch** *Carduelis chloris*. Common in Christchurch.

**European Goldfinch** *Carduelis carduelis*. Common in Christchurch.

**Lesser Redpoll** *Carduelis cabaret*. A few in Christchurch and again on Enderby Island, on Macquarie, and the Chathams.

PASERIDAE

**House Sparrow** *Passer domesticus*.

STURNIDAE

**Common Starling** *Sturnus vulgaris*.

CRACTICIDAE

**Australian Magpie** *Gymnorhina tibicen*. In Christchurch.