

# THE TRAVELLING NATURALIST

TRAVEL | EXPERIENCE | CONSERVE



## Tour Report

# New Zealand – New Zealand's Southern Wonderland

21 January - 08 February 2019

Kea



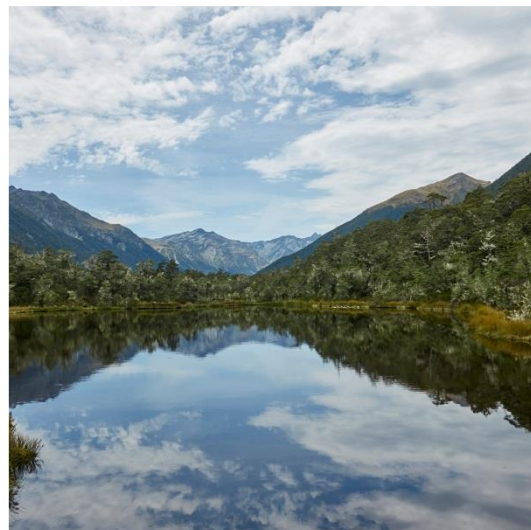
White-capped albatross



Sperm whale



Lewis Pass



Compiled by: Graeme Loh



## **Tour Leader: Graeme Loh with 8 participants**

### **Day 1: To Invercargill, then Te Anau, Fiordland**

**Monday 21 January 2019**

After meeting clients as they arrived at Invercargill airport, the weather unfortunately greeted us with squally southerly wind and showers that blew in horizontally, as we drove to Christchurch.

Plan A was to head along the south coast to Tuatapere, however the weather dictated that we headed north in the dry shelter of the Longwood Range, which offers extensive views of pasture sheep, cows and wapiti. A few harriers were seen here. A short stop at the Monowai Bridge across the hydro-depleted Waiau River meant we heard our first endemic bird - a bellbird - and good views of newly fledged swallows which were not quite the colour in the bird book. Our bird list so far was dominated by recent natural arrivals from Australia: as well as the Australasian harrier and welcome swallow, there were white-faced heron and spur-winged plover, and a threatened endemic black-billed gull greeted us as we turned into our accommodation on the Lake Te Anau foreshore.

A buffet dinner meant very quick meals with a satisfying choice before tired travellers retired.

### **Day 2: Eglinton Valley to Milford Sound**

**Tuesday 22 January 2019**

We booked the Milford Sound boat tour, as the Gertrude Saddle track was going to be rainy and windy. First stop were the red beech forests of Kiosk Creek where robins hopped into the van as soon as we got out. Kaka were flying and calling above, a harrier was floating around the flats downslope and a couple of people briefly saw a falcon zooming overhead. We walked through a soft mossy beech (*nothofagus*) forest. How wonderful that the birds were coming to us!

Lunch was taken alfresco beside the bus at Monkey Creek, before continuing to Homer Tunnel which produced great keas, five in all, checking out all things rubbery and antennas. We were filmed with a kea surfing our bus to the tunnel entrance! We took a short walk in the boulders to look for rock wren, but to no avail. The giant buttercups impressed, together with the wide range of New Zealand styles of daisies: cushion, herb, shrub and tree daisies.

At The Chasm, the falls sculpted a smooth canyon sunk in lush rainforest. The boat trip gave us brilliant waterfalls, bracing winds and cliffs towering into the clouds. We returned to Te Anau for another night.

### **Day 3: Te Anau to Bluff then Rakiura**

**Wednesday 23 January 2019**

After a leisurely start, we decided to head for south coast, dropping in at Te Anau wildlife park en route, where we had an easy view of kaka, morepork and takahe. After a comfort stop at Tuatapere we reached Te Wai Wai Bay, where we encountered stormy seas and sooty shearwaters offshore in the grey. After sheltering for lunch in Colac Bay, the group wanted to learn more about how the Maori did things, so we visited the Te Hikoi Museum at Riverton, which has a very good account and interesting artefacts of the local contact history and of muttonbirding. .

A king tide lapped at the walkway to the Stirling Point Light at the entrance to Bluff Harbour, and we were rewarded with our first albatross, with Buller's soaring, and Foveaux' shags fishing, before a ferry crossing took us to Oban on Stewart Island, where we saw sooty shearwaters, albatrosses and the Muttonbird Islands.

Dinner arrived slowly and there was a rush for the kiwi ferry which proved worth the struggle. Kiwi were well seen, as well as seabirds near Bench Island and yellow-eyed penguins. After enjoying some stargazing in the open midnight sky, we returned to our base at around 01.30.



**Day 4: Rakiura/Stewart Island****Thursday 24 January 2019**

We trotted over the hill to Golden Bay and took a ten-minute water-taxi ride across Paterson Inlet to the sanctuary of Ulva Island. The group enjoyed excellent tieke experiences, robins galore, tui feeding on the cryptic flowers of lancewood, as well as wekas boldly inspecting our beach activities. A comfortable lunch was taken on a lee beach facing the open harbour entrance, during which shag were spotted feeding nearby. We noticed contour patterns on the bark of ancient rimu trees - did they inspire Maori moko (tattoos)?

The water-taxi home did a short albatross feeding: 28 white-capped, one Buller's and two southern royal albatross, with a halo of red-billed gulls attending the opportunity. On the walk back over the hill, there were kereru feeding on konini of the kotukutuku (New Zealand pigeons feeding on the fruit of the fuchsia tree) right beside us, with tui objecting.

**Day 5: Rakiura to Bluff; Catlins then Dunedin****Friday 25 January 2019**

After an early ferry across the stormy strait, with fleeting views of prions, we enjoyed sightings of royal spoonbills at the wetland boardwalk on the outskirts of Invercargill. After lunch at Cannibal Bay, Catlins, with the sealions, we continued to Taiaroa, Dunedin, for a seabird and albatross cruise.

Our accommodation this evening was the Mercure Hotel near the Botanical Gardens, which were appreciated in the evening and again in the morning.

**Day 6: Dunedin to Lake Ohau****Saturday 26 January 2019**

Turning inland before Oamaru, we left the rain behind and made our way towards Lake Ohau, with stops at the Maraewhenua rock art shelter, Gards Road limestone bluffs rich in fossil *Dentalium*, Braids Café in Kurow, Ahuriri Delta, Pukaki Lookout with views of Aoraki/Mt Cook way above the other ranges, plus a visit to a salmon farm. Overnight at Lake Ohau Lodge.

**Day 7: Twizel & Mt Cook****Sunday 27 January 2019**

From Tasman Lake lookout up to the glacier that has now retreated into the distance, we saw the wonderful giant flower spikes of *Aciphylla aurea*, a giant member of the carrot family, and one of the few fiercely sharp plants. We then continued to Lake Pukaki.

**Day 8: Lake Ohau to Arthur's Pass****Monday 28 January 2019**

The shores of Lake Tekapo brought us black stilts and dotterels in a glaring, baking clay pan left behind by a retreating hydro lake level. Leaving Mackenzie Country, we drove across the back of the Canterbury Plains and into the Canterbury high country via Lake Coleridge and Lake Lyndon.

**Day 9: Arthur's Pass to Punakaiki on the verdant West Coast****Tuesday 29 January 2019**

A walk along Waimakariri riverbed gave us *Helichrysum depressum*, before taking the Arthur's Pass alpine boardwalk to Lake Misery. After lunch at Kumara Pub, we continue on to the shore of the Tasman Sea at Rapahoe, where there were Hector's dolphins jumping. Then to see nikau palms at Pororari Gorge; this limestone canyon was 'Rivendell' in the filming of Lord of the Rings. Overnight was spent in a motel on the beach.

**Day 10: Punakaiki to Kaikoura****Wednesday 30 January 2019**

First stop today was Truman Track, a curved limestone bay with pounding surf at high tide, then on to Constance Bay, Charleston, where gold rush ships were supposed to have landed. Then to Hawkes Crag Bluff, which is traversed by the highway on the Buller River, Springs Junction, Maruia Canyon and Lewis Pass where we found heavily flowering tussocks and peaceful alpine tarns. We experienced record temperatures in Waiau: 34° Celsius, before continuing on to the cooler Pacific Ocean coastline where coastal cliffs had collapsed during the November 2016 earthquake.



**Day 11: Kaikoura****Thursday 31 January 2019**

Today we enjoyed a seabird trip in the morning, followed by a whale watching trip in the afternoon and a clifftop coastal walk along the peninsula, looking down on folded limestone strata, past the Hutton shearwater conservation fence.

**Day 12: Kaikoura to Lake Rotoiti****Friday 1 February 2019**

Some excellent sightings of seals and pups at new Ohau Point lookout, as well as some dolphins offshore. There were no opportunities to stop the vehicle at the Papatea Fault, but the change in levels was clear to see.

Continuing to the Ure River mouth, the group saw a good range of waders through lenses vibrating in the wind. On to Grassmere, we continued the search for wrybill and curl bunting. We found a beautiful flock of 100 or so pied stilts in the saltworks and a small flock of greenfinches leapfrogged down the road in front of us, feeding on fat-hen seed heads. Saw of the group some goldfinches too. We met council ranger Mike Avis who was collecting spinifex seed heads from the dunes for restoration work; this particular beach had lifted 0.7 metres, with many consequent changes to the dunes and, unfortunately, allowed increased vehicle activity on the beach and dunes. Mike explained that the native poisonous katipo spider was being replaced by a South African relative in the dune ecosystem.

The day ended with a drive up the vineyard-clad valley floor of the Wairau River to St Arnaud on Lake Rotoiti in Nelson Lakes National Park.

**Day 13: Around Lake Rotoiti****Saturday 2 February 2019**

Mount Robert beckoned today. After climbing into the fresh cool air (above wasp altitude!), we were greeted with grand panoramic views of the top of South Island from the summit. After descending for lunch, we headed for the Honeydew Circuit in the heart of the predator-managed forest area, where wasps, rats and stoats are suppressed.

**Day 14: St Arnaud. Cook Strait to Taihape, North Island****Sunday 3 February 2019**

Today saw us venturing down the Wairau Valley, and we bid farewell to Ian, Judy, Colleen and Tui at Blenheim airport, whilst those taking the North Island extension visited the Wairau Lagoons walkway.

We bid farewell to the South Island in style, with three groups of dolphins jumping in unison on a very calm and mild Cook Strait ferry crossing. After dinner at Cobb & Co in Levin, we drove onto Taihape.

**Day 15: Taihape to Whakapapa on Mt Ruapehu****Monday 4 February 2019**

Travelling down a side road through hilly sheep country, we came to a bridge and a papa (marine mudstone) canyon with 30-metre sheer side walls covered in ferns. A kingfisher was calling - a signature bird of the North Island forests (only a scattered presence on South Island), which arrived from Australia after Maori settlement. This was followed by the harsh pleading calls of a falcon. We looked and looked. Three falcons, this year's clutch, were active in front of us on the crest of the canyon - great views! On our return we encountered the Eastern rosella, a bird introduced from Australia by Governor Grey, the first prominent Englishman to fall in love with the Australian flora and fauna.

Then it was on up to the Rangipo Desert, a plain of volcanic ash and pumice from the active Ruapehu volcano on North Island. As well as being a national park, it is used as a military training ground and is another habitat of the banded dotterel. The next volcano we came to was Ngaruhoe, a tall, dark grey, menacing cone, followed by the complex Tongariro volcano with steam coming from several rocky sulphur-coated vents.

Next stop was the Whakapapa Intake, a weir in the canyon. Whio were heard, then spotted by Dorothy: a pair in the plunge pool, one diving to forage among the boulders. We then continued up the mountain to





our accommodation on the side of an active volcano, before a short walk in the harsh lava fields which are a ski-field in winter.

**Day 16: Whakapapa. Pureora Forest, Taupo**

**Tuesday 5 February 2019**

A visit to the wharf at Tokaanu on the massive explosion crater that is now Lake Taupo, gave us New Zealand dabchick, little black shags and hundreds of black swans. I noted the vanguard of the Indian mynas spreading south for the eBird database.

A walk at Kakaho Rimu, where the tallest of the rimu are easily more than 40 metres high, gave us *Dicksonia fibrosa* tree ferns. At the Pureora Forest Tower, kaka enjoyed having a party around us, and we had discreet views of riflemen, as well as fast commuting yellow-crowned parakeets.

**Day 17: Taupo to Auckland via the geothermal district**

**Wednesday 6 February 2019**

The morning started with excellent sunlit views of kingfishers. and pukeko with chicks at Lake Okaro. We continued to Waimangu thermal area, where drifting steam across hot lake surfaces and steaming vents poured out mineral-rich hot water - a hypnotic kinetic landscape.

After a trek across the plains of pumice, past Hobbiton at Matamata, we dropped in at the Miranda Wetland Centre. 1780 wrybill were reported to be out in a line of other birds on the tide margin out in the heat haze and godwits were flying along the coast on the shell dune, as well as thousands of waders with some South Island pied oystercatchers in mud so soft they sank in to mid-tibia.

We continue to Auckland in moderate holiday traffic to a warm night on the Princes Wharf in the Harbour Basin.

**Day 18: Tawharanui & Omaha Spit**

**Thursday 7 February 2019**

Unfortunately the Tiri Tiri Island ferry was cancelled, so Plan B was formulated - off to Tawharanui Regional Park for whiteheads, brown teal, Northern New Zealand dotterels and Takahe. All were seen, with a couple of bonuses: North Island saddleback and young, as well as ring neck pheasant on the way and a red-crowned parakeet fly by for Dorothy. Almost all the birds we had hoped to see on Tiri Tiri!

We then visited David and Jill Stone, had tea at their home on Omaha Spit and learnt on site about the work of the Omaha Shorebird Sanctuary at Whangateau Harbour. Unfortunately there has been a massive increase in beach users that were unsympathetic to the needs of the threatened New Zealand dotterels. There were still some breeding attempts underway, but several nest failures this season. During the visit we saw two variable oystercatcher pairs caring for chicks. It was windy on the beach and low tide, but one eastern bar-tailed godwit made a cameo appearance on our beach path. The tide wrack of shells was particularly good on this spit.

Then back to the metropolis. We made it to the Grand Chancellor in time to change for dinner across at Princes Wharf.

**Day 19: Auckland to home.**

**Friday 8 February 2019**

Mike and Dawn took the ferry to Rangitoto and greatly enjoyed the day, and we all met at the airport later in the day.



# Checklist

THE TRAVELLING  
**NATURALIST**

	Common Name	Scientific Name	Status	Sightings
	<b>Birds</b>	<i>Aves</i>		
1	Southern brown kiwi	<i>Apteryx australis</i>	Deep Endemic	Ocean Beach, Stewart Island
2	Greylag goose	<i>Anser anser</i>	Introduced	Manapouri
3	Canada goose	<i>Branta canadensis</i>	Introduced	Wairau Lagoons
4	Black swan	<i>Cygnus atratus</i>	Native	Invercargill Boardwalk
5	Paradise shelduck	<i>Tadorna variegata</i>	Endemic	Widespread
6	Blue duck	<i>Hymenolaimus malacorhynchos</i>	Deep Endemic	Whakapapa
7	Australian shoveler	<i>Spatula rhynchotis</i>	Native	Wairau Lagoons
8	Grey duck	<i>Anas superciliosa</i>	Native	Mirror Lakes Eglinton
9	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	Introduced	Widespread
10	Grey teal	<i>Anas gracilis</i>	Native	Widespread
11	New Zealand scaup	<i>Aythya novaeseelandiae</i>	Endemic	Widespread
12	California quail	<i>Callipepla californica</i>	Introduced	Taupo
13	Ring-necked pheasant	<i>Phasianus colchicus</i>	Introduced	Tawharanui

14	Wild turkey	<i>Meleagris gallopavo</i>	Introduced	Auckland freeway
15	Great crested grebe	<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>	Native	Ohau Salmon farm
16	Rock pigeon	<i>Columba livia</i>	Introduced	Widespread
17	Spotted dove	<i>Streptopelia chinensis</i>	Introduced	Fleeting Waimangu
18	New Zealand pigeon	<i>Hemiphaga novaeseelandiae</i>	Deep Endemic	Widespread
19	Long-tailed cuckoo	<i>Urodynamis taitensis</i>	Endemic	Fleeting Kiosk Creek
20	Weka	<i>Gallirallus australis</i>	Deep Endemic	Ulva
21	Buff-banded rail	<i>Gallirallus philippensis</i>	Native	Tawharanui
22	Eurasian coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>	Native	Lake Taupo
23	Pukeko	<i>Porphyrio melanotus</i>	Native	Widespread
24	Takahe	<i>Porphyrio hochstetteri</i>	Endemic	Te Anau & Tawharanui
25	Pied stilt	<i>Himantopus leucocephalus</i>	Native	Grassmere salt works
26	South Island pied oystercatcher (SIPO)	<i>Haematopus finschi</i>	Endemic	Ure River
27	Variable oystercatcher	<i>Haematopus unicolor</i>	Native	Coastal beaches
28	Spur-winged plover	<i>Vanellus miles</i>	Native	Widespread
29	New Zealand dotterel	<i>Charadrius obscurus</i>	Endemic	Tawharanui
30	Banded dotterel	<i>Charadrius bicinctus</i>	Endemic	lake Tekapo
31	Bar-tailed godwit	<i>Limosa lapponica</i>	Arctic Migrant	Omaha Spit
32	Black-billed gull	<i>Chroicocephalus bulleri</i>	Endemic	Te Anau & Mackenzie

33	Red-billed gull	<i>Chroicocephalus scopulinus</i>	Native	Widespread
34	South black backed gull	<i>Larus dominicanus</i>	Native	Widespread
35	Caspian tern	<i>Hydroprogne caspia</i>	Native	Ure River
36	Black-fronted tern	<i>Chlidonias albobriatus</i>	Endemic	MacKenzie Country
37	White-fronted tern	<i>Sterna striata</i>	Endemic	Taiaroa
38	Yellow-eyed penguin	<i>Megadyptes antipodes</i>	Deep Endemic	Stewart Island
39	Little penguin	<i>Eudyptula minor</i>	Endemic	Kaikoura
40	Australian little penguin	<i>Eudyptula novaehollandiae</i>	Native	Taiaroa
41	Buller's mollymawk	<i>Thalassarche bulleri</i>	Endemic	Stewart Is & Taiaroa
42	White-capped (Shy) mollymawk	<i>Thalassarche cauta</i>	Endemic	Stewart Is & Taiaroa & Kaikoura
43	Northern royal albatross	<i>Diomedea sanfordi</i>	Endemic	Taiaroa
44	Wandering albatross	<i>Diomedea exulans</i>	Endemic	Kaikoura
45	Southern giant petrel	<i>Macronectes giganteus</i>	Native	Kaikoura
46	Northern giant petrel	<i>Macronectes halli</i>	Native	Taiaroa & Kaikoura
47	Cape petrel	<i>Daption capense</i>	Native	Foveaux & Kaikoura
48	Fairy prion	<i>Pachyptila turtur</i>	Native	Foveaux Strait
49	White-chinned petrel	<i>Procellaria aequinoctialis</i>	Native	Kaikoura
50	Westland petrel	<i>Procellaria westlandica</i>	Endemic	Kaikoura
51	Buller's shearwater	<i>Ardenna bulleri</i>	Endemic	Taiaroa



52	Sooty shearwater	<i>Ardenna grisea</i>	Endemic	Stewart Island
53	Hutton's shearwater	<i>Puffinus huttoni</i>	Endemic	Kaikoura
54	Fluttering shearwater	<i>Puffinus gavia</i>	Endemic	Cook Strait
55	Australasian gannet	<i>Morus serrator</i>	Native	Taiaroa
56	Little pied shag	<i>Microcarbo melanoleucos</i>	Native	Widespread
57	Black shag	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>	Native	Widespread
58	Spotted shag	<i>Phalacrocorax punctatus</i>	Endemic	Taiaroa
59	Pied shag	<i>Phalacrocorax varius</i>	Native	Te Anau
60	Otago shag	<i>Leucocarbo chalconotus</i>	Endemic	Taiaroa
61	Foveaux shag	<i>Leucocarbo stewarti</i>	Endemic	Bluff
62	White-faced heron	<i>Egretta novaehollandiae</i>	Native	Widespread
63	Reef heron	<i>Egretta sacra</i>	Native	Stewart Is & Kaikoura
64	Royal spoonbill	<i>Platalea regia</i>	Native	Invercargill Boardwalk
65	Australasian harrier	<i>Circus approximans</i>	Native	Widespread
66	Black kite	<i>Milvus migrans</i>	Vagrant	Fleeting Blenheim
67	Southern boobook	<i>Ninox novaeseelandiae</i>	Native	Te Anau
68	Sacred kingfisher	<i>Todiramphus sanctus</i>	Native	Waimangu
69	New Zealand falcon	<i>Falco novaeseelandiae</i>	Endemic	Fleeting until Taihape
70	Kea	<i>Nestor notabilis</i>	Deep Endemic	Home Tunnel & Arthurs Pass

71	New Zealand kaka	<i>Nestor meridionalis</i>	Deep Endemic	Ulva & Pureora
72	Red-crowned parakeet	<i>Cyanoramphus novaezelandiae</i>	Deep Endemic	Fleeting Ulva & Tawharanui
73	Yellow-crowned parakeet	<i>Cyanoramphus auriceps</i>	Deep Endemic	Pureora
74	Eastern rosella	<i>Platycercus eximius</i>	Introduced	Waimangu
75	Rifleman	<i>Acanthisitta chloris</i>	Deep Endemic	Pureora
76	Tui	<i>Prothemadera novaeseelandiae</i>	Deep Endemic	Widespread
77	Bellbird	<i>Anthornis melanura</i>	Deep Endemic	Widespread
78	Grey warbler	<i>Gerygone igata</i>	Native	Widespread
79	Whitehead	<i>Mohoua albicilla</i>	Deep Endemic	Tawharanui
80	Brown creeper	<i>Mohoua novaeseelandiae</i>	Deep Endemic	Ulva & Rotoiti
81	Australian magpie	<i>Gymnorhina tibicen</i>	Introduced	Widespread
82	New Zealand fantail	<i>Rhipidura fuliginosa</i>	Native	Widespread
83	Yellow-breasted tomtit	<i>Petroica macrocephala</i>	Endemic	Widespread
84	New Zealand robin	<i>Petroica australis</i>	Endemic	Kiosk Creek & Ulva
85	Skylark	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>	Introduced	Widespread
86	Welcome swallow	<i>Hirundo neoxena</i>	Native	Widespread
87	Silvereye	<i>Zosterops lateralis</i>	Native	Widespread
88	Song thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>	Introduced	Widespread
89	Eurasian blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	Introduced	Widespread
90	European starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>	Introduced	Widespread

91	Common myna	<i>Acridotheres tristis</i>	Introduced	Taupo north
92	Dunnoek	<i>Prunella modularis</i>	Introduced	Widespread
93	Australasian pipit	<i>Anthus novaeseelandiae</i>	Native	Ure River
94	Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>	Introduced	Widespread
95	European greenfinch	<i>Chloris chloris</i>	Introduced	Widespread
96	Common redpoll	<i>Acanthis flammea</i>	Introduced	Widespread
97	European goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>	Introduced	Widespread
98	Yellowhammer	<i>Emberiza citrinella</i>	Introduced	Widespread
99	House sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	Introduced	Widespread