BIRDING DOWN UNDER on board HERITAGE ADVENTURER

5 - 21 December 2023



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Day 1 Tuesday, December 5 Queenstown

Our Birding Down Under adventure began in sunny Queenstown, New Zealand's world famous alpine resort town, as we arrived at our respective accommodations and met fellow guests and some of our expedition team. We settled in and enjoyed a delicious dinner with the excitement quickly building for the start of our expedition tomorrow.

Day 2 Wednesday, December 6 Queenstown, Bluff

The weather in Queenstown continued the sunshine from our arrival day. At breakfast, we had the chance to reconnect with our fellow adventurers before heading out to explore this bustling adventure town. We could be seen all over the waterfront, gardens and mall - doing last-minute shopping or checking the birdlife along the lake shore.

A quick lunch, then into the coaches for the transfer through the pastoral countryside of Southland to Bluff Harbour to board our beautiful new home for the upcoming adventure, *Heritage Adventurer*. We scattered to explore, then came together for the lifeboat drill and introductory briefings. Hotel Director Erik introduced us to life aboard, and Expedition Leader Aaron told us what to expect on our excursions and introduced the Expedition Team – more than 20 experts who will help us get the most out of our expedition. We had our first chance to sample the delights provided by the kitchen and dining room staff. Next was the Mud Rooms to ensure that our new boots fit properly, and that we would be ready for our first excursion tomorrow morning.

We cast off at 2130, with the sun still lighting the sky, and in the knowledge that we had days of long daylight and adventure ahead.



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Day 3 Thursday, December 7 Snares Islands

The Southern Ocean can be gentle, but that was not the case for our first night, as we experienced some challenging conditions. We had been warned and were well prepared with our cabins secured.

The 'motion of the ocean' affects everyone differently, so the discussion and appetite at breakfast was quite varied. With no landings allowed, the Zodiac cruise at the Snares generates high expectations. On this occasion all expectations were exceeded. Safely on the Zodiacs, we headed to the shelter of the protected bays where the conditions were calm and the sun shone on this remarkable wild place.

Everyone observed Snares Crested Penguins and New Zealand Fur Seals – both groups very busy coming and going from the shore, and the seals especially playful. We also spotted the Snares Island Tomtit, Fernbird, Cape Petrel, and Red-billed Gull. Some were lucky to observe Snares Island Snipe, Leopard Seals, Buller's Albatross and Fulmar.

Of course, all this activity played out against the backdrop of the caves and inlets in the folded granite rocks and the Tree Daisy (*Olearia lyallii*) canopy. What an amazing first activity for this expedition!

Our Zodiac cruise was extended as Captain re-positioned *Heritage Adventurer* to give us the easiest possible conditions at the gangway. The work done by the Expedition Team was superb and we knew we were in good hands.

We were back on board for a late lunch with plenty of chatter in the dining room. A mandatory bio-security briefing instructed us on how to ensure that we carry no pests – followed by thorough cleaning and inspection of all our outer layers. Matt gave us a presentation on Introduction to Seabirds, Aaron gave a briefing on tomorrow, and the Captain's Welcome Cocktails primed us for an extraordinary meal.



This was truly a day to remember.



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Day 4 Friday, December 8 Enderby Island, Auckland Islands

The overnight passage was somewhat easier than the first night – or perhaps we were just adapting to the conditions. In any case, there was a full turnout for breakfast and to pick up the packed lunches for the day ashore.

We were greeted with a typical Subantarctic day – a brisk cool wind, occasional passing showers and brilliant sunshine. In other words, a perfect day to explore Enderby Island. We were given three options –

a full-day circuit of the island, a full day on the boardwalk and northern cliffs, or a morning Zodiac cruise with the afternoon ashore. There were no bad options.

The circuit walkers set off first – passing the beach where New Zealand/Hooker's Sea Lions were gathering in preparation for breeding. Two newborn pups were spotted among the few early-arriving females. They continued their circuit with sightings of Yellow-eyed Penguin and Auckland Islands Snipe, good reasons for a celebratory beverage at the end.

Along the boardwalk, the megaherbs *Bulbinella Rossii* were in full flower and the Southern Royal Albatross were soaring. At the cliffs, the Light-mantled Sooty Albatross were seen nesting and the Auckland Island Shags passed with beaks full of nesting material.

The morning Zodiac cruise was a delight with Auckland Island Teal, Red-crowned Parakeet, and flowing basalt lava showing off.

Back on the comforts of *Heritage Adventurer* after our first landing, we learned how to use the equipment in the Mud Rooms to rid ourselves of any potential contaminants. It is clear that the Expedition Team takes this facet of our voyage very seriously, and so should we. We had a pre-dinner catch-up on the species list – with truly impressive results, now accustomed to our evening routine of conversation and cuisine.



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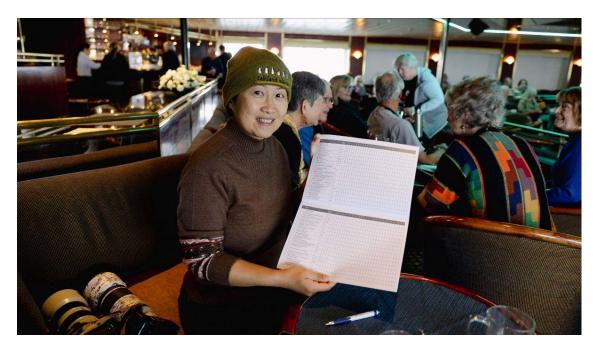
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Day 5 Saturday, December 9 At Sea en route to Macquarie Island

After a deserved sleep-in, we had the chance to catch up on our education. We had excellent presentations from Peter on Penguins 101, Cathy on The Importance of Composition in Creating Beautiful Images, John on Macquarie Island and Auckland Islands History, and Hamish on The Geology of the Subantarctic Islands.

There was plenty of time for birding on the back deck, sorting photos, and attending to bio-security preparations. We then enjoyed another night of excellent food and company.





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Day 6 Sunday, December 10 Sandy Bay, Macquarie Island

We had an incredible start to the day observing Orca before breakfast. It was a leisurely morning as we were required to wait for 0700 Australia time – or 0900 ship time.

We attended the briefing, but expectations were quickly exceeded as our eyes went 'BOING' and our senses were overloaded at the landing. First to grab our attention were the 'weaners', Southern Elephant Seal pups, scattered on the beach as we disembarked the Zodiacs. They were perhaps one month old and recently weaned by their mothers. With their huge eyes and attention-seeking curiosity (are you my mother?), they were irresistible. A little further up the beach were the older Elephant Seals lying in piles and occasionally roughhousing.

We knew that there would be penguins – but still, we were not prepared for the spectacle! The King Penguins were standing in large groups or parading in small groups – superbly beautiful with their long necks and glistening silver, white and yellow plumage. Meanwhile, the busy smaller Royal Penguins were streaming across the beach on the way to or from the sea. Once in the water they played and washed as we smiled and laughed.

Everything was amazing, but the highlights were at either end of the beach – up the boardwalk to the Royal Penguin colony and along the lagoon to the King Penguin colony. The Royal Penguin colony was all action with coming and going adults feeding the many chicks. The King Penguin colony was more sedate, but the bugling songs of the adults contrasted with the musical chiming call of the brown downy chicks, to create a delightful symphony of sounds.

Zodiac transfers allowed visits to the Rockhopper Penguins and we all had the opportunity to return to Sandy Bay later in the afternoon. Many of us made the second Zodiac trip for more time ashore and to

soak in this incredible wildlife haven. What a treat to immerse ourselves in this environment, seeing penguins with a variety of crests; or stand still and have a weaner come to us and look up with those huge brown eyes. Or we could spend more time at the King Penguin colony to see the brown furry 'Oakum Boy' chicks pestering their parents for food.

Every day has been amazing, but we truly had to pinch ourselves to make sure that this one was not a dream. Yes, we were tired, but the chatter and energy at dinner was undiminished.



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Day 7 Monday, December 11 Lusitania Bay and The Isthmus, Macquarie Island A memorable day for all and not least *Heritage Adventurer* with its bold claim that Madeira is 'home'. After a calm night at anchor in Sandy Bay, we set sail for our southernmost destination, Lusitania Bay, an hour away. Sporting the Portuguese flag on the back of *Heritage Adventurer* seemed entirely appropriate, as Lusitania is the old Roman name for Portugal.

We celebrated with an early breakfast, before a splendid one-hour Zodiac voyage to witness the largest King Penguin colony on 'Macca', and then a second breakfast, as we ship cruised north for a couple of hours, a gentle stroll up-country.

The afternoon had us all ashore at 'The Isthmus' at Buckles Bay at the northern end of the island, home to numerous moulting Elephant Seals.

We all got to experience the westerly gale and observe birds in their element, including a group of almost pure white Southern Giant Petrel, King Penguins, Gentoo Penguins, Brown Skuas, Macquarie Island Shags, Redpolls and the rare Song Thrush. The Razorback Ridge walk provided a respite from the wind and commanding views over the Research Base.

Safely stowed back on the comforts of *Heritage Adventurer* by 1700, we were treated to a range of interesting lectures including Cetaceans by Dan, Killer Whales by Ian, Elephant Seals by Rachael and Crazy Life-defining Moments with Penguins as experienced by Kevin and Peter. A superb dinner followed as we headed Northeast towards Campbell Island, with a lovely following sea.

A spectacular day was had by all!



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Day 8 Tuesday, December 12 At Sea en route to Campbell Island

We turned downwind and as we left Macquarie Island, *Heritage Adventurer* became a giant surfboard as we rode the sea to Campbell Island. Seabirds enjoyed the conditions even more than we did on the decks observing their antics. Watching the sea may have been even better than watching the birds, as the tables in the dining room at lunch and dinner became theatre seats for the natural show. All that and a tasty curry selection too.

With the day at sea our Expedition Staff was able to fill our minds almost as well as the kitchen staff filled our bodies. We had superb presentations from Kevin on Strange Tales of Island Life: Biology in Isolation, Jonathan on Terrestrial Birds of New Zealand's Subantarctic Islands, Peter on Ocean Nomads, Chris on Megaherbs and Introduction to Campbell Island Flora, and John on Campbell Island History.

The culinary delights never stop – today included an extravagant afternoon High Tea on the High Seas and the endless choices at dinner.



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Day 9 Wednesday, December 13 Campbell Island

Heritage Adventurer made the left turn from the open sea into the sheltered waters of Perseverance Harbour in the early morning light. That gentle start did not give a true indication of what was to come, as this turned out to be our first truly Subantarctic day.

We had been offered three choices – the long walk to North West Bay, the all-day walk on Mount Honey, or the morning Zodiac cruise and afternoon ascent of the boardwalk to Col Lyall Saddle. It was certainly a hard choice to make with plenty of discussion before decisions were made.

The long walkers set off first, then the Mount Honey group, then the Zodiac cruisers – by far the largest group. The morning was mostly cloud, wind and sideways rain for all three groups. All were out in the elements experiencing Campbell Island for the wild place it is. The afternoon had many brighter patches, but the next squally shower was never too far away.

When we reconvened back on our trusty expedition vessel for refreshments before dinner, the comparisons started. Admittedly, some found the effort required daunting, but all found the rewards outstanding.

"Ours was the best," said the long walkers – "we saw everything"; "but no", said the Mount Honey group. "Some of us made the summit and had Megaherbs and Albatross everywhere". "You're both wrong", said the board walkers – "We had time sitting with a nesting pair of Albatross and set personal records for the windiest place I have ever been".

All had had the opportunity to see many Southern Royal Albatross, Campbell Island Snipe, Flightless Campbell Island Teal, New Zealand Sea Lions and to battle the elements to climb and enjoy the spectacular vistas. We were all tired but happy.

Dinner was very welcome, as was our return to surfing downwind with rainbows off the port beam.



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Day 10 Thursday, December 14 At Sea enroute to Antipodes Islands

Our most Subantarctic day so far was followed by our least Subantarctic day today. The sun shone with fluffy clouds in the blue sky. *Heritage Adventurer* continued to provide a comfortable glide over the calm sea. The seabirds were resplendent in the sunshine.

We enjoyed a series of excellent lectures. First up this morning was Mike with Albatross Research on the Chatham Islands; then Peter continued to help us understand the submariners of the bird world with Penguins 201. A break for Nasi Goreng and more deck time was followed by Chris with Of Seals, Mice and Men, the Discovery, Exploitation, History and Conservation of the Antipodes and Bounty Islands.

Happy hour provided canapes and half-priced cocktails – and we enjoyed more presentations and a species list update from Dan.

After dinner, as the sun set, it was hard to believe we were in the Southern Ocean. The westerly winds had dropped and the sea calmed. To top off the day, Robyn came on the PA to announce an Aurora Australis during the brief dark hours, which provided plenty of amazing photo opportunities. We went to bed smiling.



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Day 11 Friday, December 15, 2023 Antipodes Islands

The fine weather and gentle conditions continued as *Heritage Adventurer* cruised up the east coast of the main Antipodes Island during breakfast and dropped anchor – in Anchorage Bay, of course.

The Expedition Team made a start on the operation before it became clear that the westerly swell was too large for safe operation. So, back south we went to Ringdove Bay on the more sheltered southeast coast. Along the way, several Antipodean Albatross circled above.

We launched our Zodiacs and cruised the Bay getting close views of the Erect-crested Penguins on the rocks and in the water. A few Rockhopper Penguins were in the mix too. Our keen eyes were busy scanning the tussocks, and eventually, both Red-crowned and Antipodes Parakeets were found. The sky was filled with birds for the whole cruise, notably the Light-mantled Sooty Albatross and Fairy Prion.

The sea state was itself a highlight, with our skilled drivers safely guiding the Zodiacs close to where the large rollers were crashing on the rocks. What a wild place.

Our Zodiac cruise was extended into the early afternoon, as we headed back to *Heritage Adventurer* for a delicious barbecue. As the afternoon progressed, we made a circumnavigation of the islands enjoying the dramatic scenery and searching the coast for penguin colonies.

The recap and briefing were focused on the plight of the Antipodean Albatross, with heavy losses of females to long-line fishing, and efforts to protect them. Matt and Aaron explained the issue, then Polly described efforts by the New Zealand Nature Fund (<u>https://nznaturefund.org/</u>) to raise money to support education among the fishermen, and we had a chance to contribute ourselves. With the Expedition Team as models, Shirley and Peter auctioned off several hats custom-made to replicate various seabirds. All sold for this excellent cause with plenty of laughter provided as well.



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Day 12 Saturday, December 16, 2023 Bounty Islands

Our adventure today was off to an early start, as Expedition Leader Aaron Russ announced the 0630 departure for a Zodiac cruise at the Bounty Islands. We arrived on time and found conditions about as favourable as possible – albeit with the swell still present.

Despite some challenging weather conditions, we safely boarded the Zodiacs and departed for a scenic cruise of the Bounty Island group.

This was an astounding morning no matter how you look at it. We have been in some superb wild places on this voyage – with more to come – but most of us would put the Bounty Islands at the top of the list.

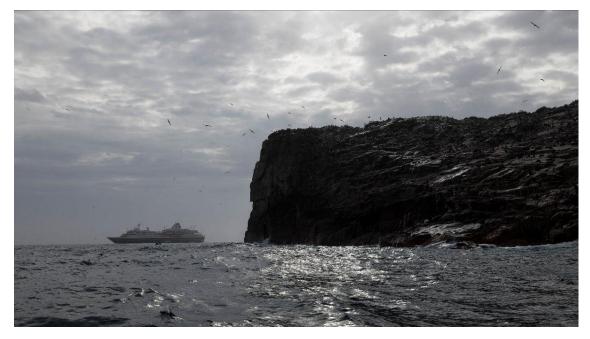
William Bligh might have called them "bare and desolate" in 1788, but we know better. The scattered dots of rock with intricate passages between them would be fantastic enough, but they are just the start, there is so much life here too. Add in swarming Salvin's Albatross in the clouds with chicks on ledges, New Zealand Fur Seals in huge numbers with pups everywhere and Erect-crested Penguins on the rocks coming and going. Then high above us, and rafting and porpoising around us; Fulmar Prions showing us their beauty; and assorted Shags, Giant Petrels and more. All that before breakfast. We thanked Aaron for the early start!

It seemed just a blink before we were on our way again – headed east back to the open sea. The afternoon was full of deck time for bird watching, picture sorting, and education. Hamish described How Chatham Island Got its Funny Shape and Rachel took us Delving Deeper into the Mysterious World of Whales and Dolphins.

The recap and briefing were packed with Hamish describing Bounty Island geology, Ian describing the animals observed (Long-finned Pilot Whale and Sperm Whale), Gerald amusing us with Sounds from the Natural World, and John introducing us to the godfather of New Zealand Conservation, Richard Henry.



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Day 13 Sunday, December 17 Chatham Islands

Our early morning navigation through prime seabird waters was limited by the fog that hid the top section of The Pyramid/Pyramid Rock. Thankfully, it did not hide our views of the world's only Chatham Albatross colony. After several circumnavigations, with heartfelt commentary from Mike and Peter, we continued north to South East Island.

After an early lunch, we boarded the Zodiacs in summertime conditions. The fog had burned off and the

day began to heat up. Along the kelp-fringed shore Oystercatchers, Shore Plovers, Shags, Pipits and New Zealand Fur Seals were easy to see. One very obliging Buller's Albatross posed at sea for all, but the Little Penguins were seen by only some. Looking above the rocks into the bush edge rewarded some with fleeting views of Parakeets and Tomtits. It was a special moment on board as we observed the critically endangered Black Robin. Heritage Expeditions co-founder Rodney Russ was heavily involved in the conservation project to relocate Black Robins, saving them from extinction, and on board today was his son and our Expedition Leader Aaron Russ, who spotted this marvellous bird.

After the delightful Zodiac adventure, we boarded *Heritage Adventurer* for a cruise around the coast of Pitt Island. The voyage was narrated by Ruka for local interest, Hamish for geology, and Mike for birding. Especially touching was passing Mangere and Little Mangere Islands as Mike told us the history of the saving of the Black Robin – including efforts by his father, Brian Bell, and Aaron's father, Rodney Russ – as our Captain took us in close to the rugged cliffs.

The briefing program was pushed forward so that we could join the search for the rare Tāiko after dinner. Unfortunately, as we arrived on Deck 8, the fog rolled in. In true adventurer spirit, we added layers and persevered, but ultimately the attractions of the Observation Lounge or the Bar proved irresistible.



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Day 14 Monday, December 18 Chatham Island

After a night at anchorage in the Port of Waitangi, we awoke to an early start for proceedings at 0615, including having to advance our clocks by 45 minutes to fit in with Chatham Time.

Our adventures resumed with a quick Zodiac shuttle to Waitangi Wharf. We split into groups with appropriate vehicles and drivers organised by Toni Croon at Hotel Chatham.

For most, it was a visit to the southwest coast of Chatham Island, beyond Point Durham, to the Awatotara Reserve established by Bruce and Liz Tuanui for Paraea, the Chatham Island Pigeon. We observed the Chatham Island Warbler, Tūī and Fantail, not to mention the full spectrum of trees, shrubs and ferns endemic to the Chatham Islands.

More than 80 of us chose to visit the Tāiko reserve known as Sweetwater with Mike Bell, Dave Boyle, Hamish Chisholm and hosts Bruce & Liz Tuanui. What a remarkable experience! Never have so many been able to observe Chatham Island Tāiko (Magenta Petrel) and Chatham Island Petrel in one day.

Back in Waitangi, the largest settlement on Chatham Island, we enjoyed the delights of this quaint town visiting the new museum, general store, Waitangi Café, Hotel Chatham and the craft shop. It was a day of highlights including a walk on the beach in Petre Bay, a walk up to the lookout at Tikitiki Hill, wonderfully fresh fish (Blue Cod) and chips at the hotel, a taste of the local beer (Breezy); and some retail therapy.

To cap things off, some lucky folk were able to visit Rapanui Road, home to 'local' Emu, a few others had a 'Yuri special' looking for Chatham Island Shag, and a whole bus load visited Admiral Garden, home of Val & Lois Croon.

All in all, a lovely day was had by all, made memorable by the remarkable birds of the Chathams and so many lovely welcoming people. The day was closed with an exclamation point as Kevin grabbed his guitar and John Lennon costume and gave a rousing rendition of KELP! He explained that kelp is an algae, not a plant. He is such a fungi (fun guy).



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Day 15 Tuesday, December 19, Wednesday December 20 At Sea en route to Bluff

We awoke to the sun streaming through the window or portholes and Heritage Adventurer gliding over the

Southern Ocean disguised as a millpond. We were going to need hats and sunglasses rather than hoods and raincoats for our deck time on this sea day.

The education/entertainment programme began with Mike's presentation of The Tāiko Conservation Story. The Chatham Island focus continued with Kim Hill, a guest on board and a well-known Radio New Zealand host, in a Chatham Chat with Val Croon, Ruka Lanauze and Mike Bell. We took a rollicking tour through the stories of Chatham Island adventures, personalities and potential futures.

After lunch, Chris explained how Māori and Moriori came to settle the Auckland Islands in his talk Guns, Pigs and Potatoes. The kitchen staff made sure we were well fed with a sumptuous afternoon of High Tea on the High Seas before Shirley described her Journey to the South Pole. We then had a chance to mingle and chat over book signings and recollections with Shirley, Peter and the Expedition Team.

We continued our day with more birding on the top deck, relaxing in the comforts of *Heritage Adventurer* and enjoying a range of informative presentations. The day was capped off as we spotted a breaching Southern Bottlenose Whale.

Our second day at sea saw a smooth approach to Bluff, as we enjoyed the range of activities *Heritage Adventurer* had to offer. We enjoyed a delicious lunch, a quiz and more informative presentations including Aaron Russ giving us the full overview of the family business in his talk Heritage Expeditions: The Story So Far.

To finish the day, we gathered in the lounge for the Captain's Farewell Cocktails and a chance to thank all the amazing teams who have made this voyage so wonderful. We enjoyed recapping the full species list and final slideshow, before another delightful dinner experience with birthday girls and others long into the night.



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Day 16 Thursday, December 21 Bluff

It was a sad farewell as our luggage was moved to the passageway, one final breakfast together enjoyed, customs cleared, and contact information exchanged. Time then for a final walk down the gangway and one last wave to the incredible Expedition Team as we headed off on new adventures, secure in the knowledge that this expedition, and our experience together on board *Heritage Adventurer*, will linger in our memories for a very long time.



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