

BIRDING DOWN UNDER

on board HERITAGE ADVENTURER

3 - 19 December 2024



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Day 1

Tuesday, 3 December 2024

Queenstown

Our Birding Down Under adventure began in Queenstown, New Zealand's world-famous alpine resort town, as we arrived from around the globe. We checked into our accommodations and met fellow guests and some of our Expedition Team in the lobby. Later that evening, we gathered to enjoy a welcome dinner where everyone soon became fast friends, and the Expedition Team gave a brief introduction and welcome speech outlaying the adventure awaiting us.

Day 2

Wednesday, 4 December 2024

Queenstown to Bluff and departure

At breakfast, we had the chance to reconnect with new friends before exploring this bustling adventure town. We could be seen along the waterfront, gardens and mall - doing last-minute shopping or checking the birdlife along the lake shore.

After lunch, we boarded 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. Expedition Leader Cheli 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 taste the delights of the menu provided by the galley and dining room staff. Next was the Mud Rooms to ensure that our new boots fit and that we would be ready for our first excursion tomorrow morning. We cast off with warnings to secure our cabins and potential rough seas after we cleared the lee of Stewart Island.



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Day 3

Thursday, 5 December 2024

Snares Islands

We experienced the 'motion of the ocean' during the night and awoke to find *Heritage Adventurer* tucked into the lee on the east coast of Northeast Island in the Snares. We watched out the windows during breakfast as Cheli and the Expedition Team assessed conditions. The decision was made that a Zodiac cruise was possible.

We had been split into four groups to manage our disembarkations – Albatross, Sea Lions, Megaherbs and Penguins. The Zodiac cruise was split into two sections using these groups. The conditions at the gangway were challenging, and we soon came to appreciate the skill of our Captain, the Zodiac drivers, and the Able Bodies Seamen (ABs) on the gangway, getting us safely on and off the Zodiacs.

Once away, the Zodiac cruise was magnificent. We entered Ho Ho Bay through a lava tube tunnel to find an extravaganza of wildlife. There were Snares Crested Penguins, New Zealand Fur Seals, New Zealand Sea Lions, a single Southern Elephant Seal, New Zealand Fernbirds, Tomtits, Shags and, for a lucky few, even the elusive Snipe. The iconic gnarly rocks were topped with Tree Daisies and Megaherbs. Perhaps the highlight of our cruise was the Penguin Slide, which sees thousands of Snares Crested Penguins navigating this near-vertical section of rock.

Back on board, we soon learned that lunch would match dinner and breakfast, and we would be well-fed on this voyage. We had work to do in the afternoon to clean our outerwear and have it inspected in preparation for upcoming landings. We will be careful with the strict biosecurity protocols to prevent the transmission of invasive species or diseases between island groups.

Phil started the voyage education program with his talk on Introduction to Seabirds before the bar opened, and we had a chance to share a beverage during the recap and Cheli's briefing. The evening was capped by the Captain's Welcome Dinner, which marked the start of an exciting adventure ahead.



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Day 4

Friday, 6 December 2024

Enderby Island, Auckland Islands

We awoke today anchored near Sandy Bay, Enderby Island, in the Auckland Islands. Cheli and the Expedition Team outlined our options, and we chose either the all-day island circuit walk, the all-day northern cliffs boardwalk, or the dual experience of a morning Zodiac cruise and afternoon landing. The all-day groups collected their lunches and disembarked first with their guides.

The dual experience group boarded the Zodiacs for a cruise around Port Ross, observing Hoiho/Yellow-eyed Penguins, Auckland Island Shags, flightless Auckland Island Teal, Light-mantled Sooty Albatross, and various other shore birds. The basaltic columns set a dramatic scene topped by flowering red Rātā Trees with Bellbird songs heard. This group came back aboard for lunch. Unfortunately, the afternoon landing wasn't possible due to a rising tide and large swell making shoreside conditions unsuitable. John helped fill the afternoon with his talk on Auckland Island History, and we enjoyed a tasty High Tea.

The all-day group enjoyed a fabulous day ashore. The New Zealand Sea Lions put on a spectacle. The males were gathering on the beach, and the few females arrived, making the terrace above a viewpoint for nature at her most brutal. Along the boardwalk, Banded Dotterel were out in force, we enjoyed distant views of soaring Southern Royal Albatross, and the *Bulbinella rossii* and *Anisotome latifolia* were in bloom. In places, the *Azorella polaris* was abundant. There were fabulous views of Red-crowned Parakeet/Kākāriki,

Auckland Island Snipe and a New Zealand Falcon. The walkers finished with a wade through mid-calf deep water to reach the Zodiacs, but all made it safely back aboard after a sensational adventure.

There was time for a hot shower, photo sorting, and time to relax as we set sail before re-gathering in the lounge to share stories and attend the Captain's Welcome Cocktails, where Captain Jasek introduced the heads of the various departments. Another delightful and talkative meal followed as the dining room was back full and everyone had stories to share. Phil led a group of birders, aptly named the Bird Club, to meet every evening after dinner to review the species list and share findings.



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Day 5

Saturday, 7 December 2024

At sea enroute to Macquarie Island

With a sea day ahead, many of us took the chance to sleep in. Once we emerged, it was to *Heritage Adventurer* gliding through much calmer seas. The day was sunny and warm, with the decks full. The first presentation was from Hamish on Zealandia, the Hidden Continent, followed by Pam's talk on Taxonomic Changes to Australian Birds.

Because of our landing at Enderby Island, we were required to clean our gear and have it inspected by the team. After biosecurity, afternoon activities included time in the Observation Lounge, a massage at the spa, a visit to the shop, reading, and napping. Most managed to wake up for Tony's talk on Cetaceans of the Southern Ocean, which left us searching off the decks not just for seabirds but also for whales and dolphins.

The bar was open in the Lounge, before the recap and briefing gave a chance to share stories and meet a few new friends. We continued to be spoiled by the Galley and Dining Room teams before we headed to bed.

Day 6

Sunday, 8 December 2024

Macquarie Island

We awoke at dawn for a rare opportunity – a transit along the wild west coast of Macquarie Island. With only a gentle westerly swell and unusual easterly winds, the conditions were perfect. We enjoyed views of the cliffs seldom seen and were greeted by the resident pod of Orca as we rounded Southwest Point. From there, we turned north to cruise the largest Royal Penguin colony at Hurd Point and the largest King Penguin Colony at Lusitania Bay. At Lusitania Bay, we saw the digesters left from the oiling era of the late 1800s, now surrounded by hundreds of thousands of birds.

We spent the remainder of the day in Sandy Bay, ashore and Zodiac cruising in ideal conditions. Every guide kept telling us that they had never seen it better. Each group enjoyed 3 hours ashore and an hour-long Zodiac cruise. The beach was in constant activity, with King and Royal Penguins and Elephant Seals competing for our attention. Everywhere we turned was a scene of unique and spectacular wildlife and landscape. A walk up the boardwalk allowed a glimpse of the Megaherbs and an overview of the terrain. The Zodiac cruise took us on a circuit of the bay from Brothers Point to the Rockhopper Penguins in the bluffs. A few managed to capture a photo that contained all four penguin species that breed on Macquarie Island, as a lone Gentoo Penguin came into the bay to check out the action. Even the time aboard was stimulating, with countless King Penguins surrounding *Heritage Adventurer*.

The recap and briefing were delayed giving us the maximum time in this environment. Dinner was a buzz of laughter and stories, and the species list review was rewarding! Every

day in the Subantarctic is special, but this long day from dawn to dusk was especially special. What a day.



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Day 7
Monday, 9 December
Macquarie Island

The night was spent at anchor at Sandy Bay before the short transit north to The Isthmus and the site of Macquarie Island Station. It was clear to all that the crashing surf on the landing beach wouldn't allow us ashore on the east coast. Our Captain navigated *Heritage Adventurer* around Wireless Hill and towards the shore of the normally wild west coast. The unusual easterly swell made a landing possible – for only the second time in the long history of visits to Macquarie Island by Heritage Expeditions.

However, possible does not mean easy. We boarded our Zodiacs, made the shuttle to the beach and enjoyed a rewarding tour of the Gentoo Penguin colony, the entrance to the station, and a walk on the west coast. The Elephant Seal weaners were especially hopeful that we were their mother. The activity and energy of this truly wild place will stick in our memory for a long time.

As predicted, conditions did worsen during our visit. The return to *Heritage Adventurer* was splashy, and the transfer from the Zodiac to the gangway was challenging. In a remarkable display of skill, strength and bravery, the team of ABs in the gangway gang excelled. We owed them a huge THANK YOU – so at the briefing later in the evening, Cheli and our Captain introduced them to sustained applause and informed us of opportunities to support them and their shipmates through a silent auction or direct contribution. This was a classic example of the 'Heritage Way'. Few, if any, other operators would even have looked at the west coast, let alone managed to land and tour.

We enjoyed a delicious lunch as we returned to the comforts of our trusty expedition vessel. After catching our breath, the normal sea day routine re-commenced, with many of us lining the outside decks with cameras and binoculars. The education program included Steve Bradley helping us with Making the Most of Your Cameras and Phones before Nigel Marven gave us a humorous insight into his working life in his talk It Shouldn't Happen to a Wildlife Presenter.

The evening included retail therapy in the shop, the recap and briefing, another superb meal, the Bird Club for a species review, and the usual sharing of stories and photos.



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Day 8

Tuesday, 10 December 2024

At sea enroute to Campbell Island

Enjoying a sleep-in, the morning found *Heritage Adventurer* crossing the deep blue sea in blue skies with fluffy white clouds – conditions that persisted throughout the day. The birdwatching paused for Rod's talk on Island Magic; How Plants and Animals Reach Islands and How Island Living Changes Them, followed by Mike Gottfried's presentation Evolution and Marine Adaptations of Whales and Penguins.

After lunch, was biosecurity. The artists among us headed up to the Observation Lounge for a chance to learn how to draw a penguin with David. Chris completed our education for the day with Brilliant Botanicals of the Subantarctic.

At recap and briefing, Cheli outlined our choices for Campbell Island tomorrow and announced that the silent T-shirt auction and donations to the ABs on the gangway had raised over \$US1,500 - to be used to purchase neoprene waders and Gill jackets. So, it was with a spirit of satisfaction and anticipation that we enjoyed our dinner, drinks, Bird Club and, for most of us, an early night.



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Day 9

Wednesday, 11 December 2024

Campbell Island

The early risers among us awoke at dawn to be on deck for the arrival at Southwest Bay and the transit up the east coast to Bull Rock. Cheli announced our arrival as a wake-up call to the rest of us. The lighting conditions were superb for viewing the Campbell, Grey-headed and Black-browed Albatross colonies on the cliffs – and in the air.

As we cruised into Perseverance Harbour, we enjoyed breakfast. First away was the small group walking the Northwest Bay Circuit, followed by the larger group that had chosen to spend all day on the Col Lyall boardwalk. The dual experience Zodiac cruise came next.

The fact that Campbell Island is the windiest place in New Zealand was apparent in all activities. The Circuit Walkers immersed themselves in fierce winds at the top of the island while seeing both nesting and flying Southern Royal Albatross. On our Zodiac cruise, we circled the harbour and observed New Zealand Sea Lions, a Giant Petrel chick, and the famous World's Loneliest Tree.

Those going up the Col Lyall boardwalk had a varied Subantarctic experience depending on the time of day. The morning group walked into the clouds and had hail alongside strong, sideways rain. The afternoon was dry but windier – especially after the northerly front hit. Despite all this, observations of several nesting Southern Royal Albatross, including one just by the boardwalk, made it all worthwhile. They didn't take to the air, but

they were magnificent sitting in regal repose on their nests.

At the landing, the New Zealand Sea Lions put on a show, swimming around the Zodiacs alongside the flightless Campbell Island Teal. It proved to be a good day for Snipe sightings, with observations for those who made the effort and a few surprises for those just strolling along. The megaherb garden up at the top was full of all the varieties, and we admired the texture and colour of the foliage.

We were back on board *Heritage Adventurer* at 1600 and returned to the open sea. A fabulous day finished with the usual frivolity of dinner, drinks, and Bird Club.



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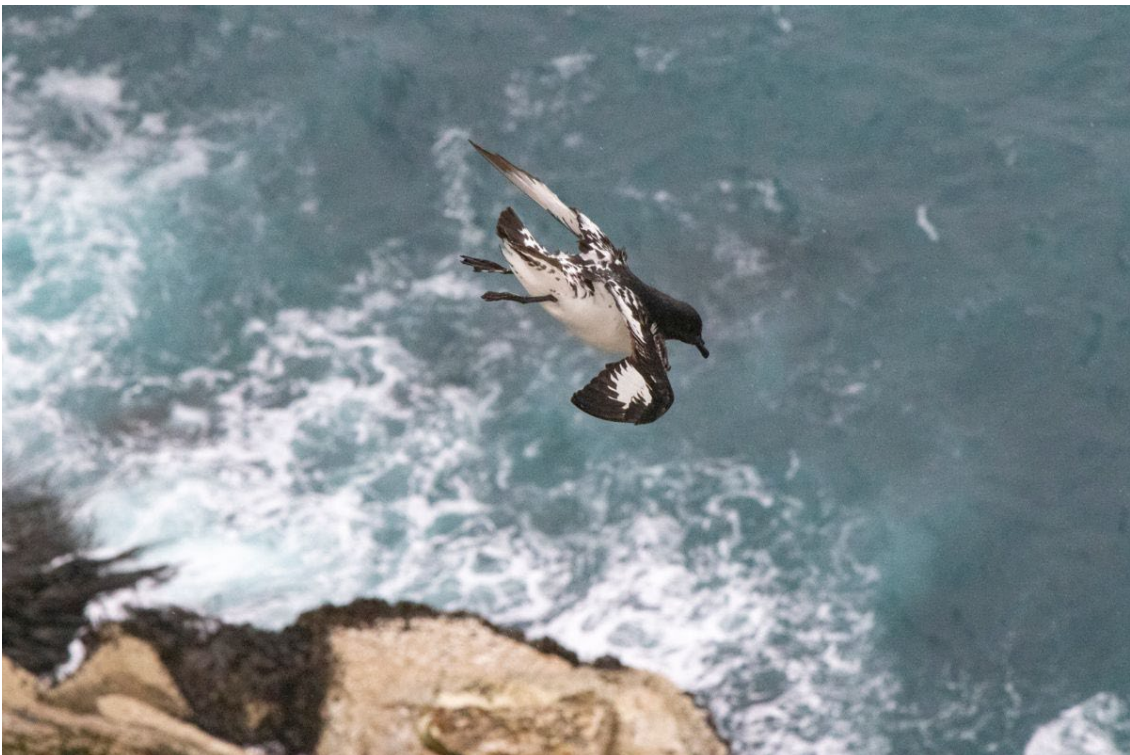
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Day 10
Thursday, 12 December 2024
At Sea enroute to the Antipodes Islands

The sea days on our voyage provided a suitable counterpoint to the activity days. They gave a chance for rest, reflection, deck time and conversation. They also showed a great depth of knowledge in the Expedition Team with interesting presentations.

So, after a well-deserved sleep-in and breakfast, we convened in the lounge for Steve Howell and Phil's informative talk on Prions and Albatross. Hamish followed with his insights into a much different topic with the Geological Origins of the Subs, including the Chatham Islands. All this thinking gave us a hunger for more than knowledge, which was soon satisfied in the bistro and dining room.

The early afternoon was free for personal activities until Swedish-born Hotel Director Erik popped up in the lounge with Swedish Pancakes and all the trimmings. The education programme ramped up in the afternoon with Jamie's Travel Writing Workshop followed by Nigel showing clips and telling stories from his many documentaries on Penguins.

There was the always interesting recap and briefing, dinner, and two after-dinner options – the Bird Club and Steve Bradley's tutorial on Lightroom Processing. It was a toss-up as to whether our brains or our bellies were most full as we went to sleep in preparation for a day of activity to come.



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Day 11
Friday, 13 December 2024
Antipodes Islands

The fog which set in the previous afternoon persisted in the morning. Still, the lower section of the impressively rugged east coast cliffs of Antipodes Island was visible as our Captain brought *Heritage Adventurer* nearby. We anchored off the northeast corner which soon revealed the best conditions of the voyage – perfect for a Zodiac cruise.

We split into two groups for the 2.5-hour Zodiac cruise. The morning group departed, while the afternoon group watched from the decks as they vanished into the fog which soon lifted for a stunning day.

The afternoon group enjoyed the special BBQ lunch in anticipation of their cruise, while the morning group enjoyed it as a reward. In either case, it was fun to revel with a meal on the open deck watching the Zodiacs full of fellow adventurers explore the coast.

The wildlife did their best to join the party - as one birding guide was heard to comment “everyone saw everything”. This is to say that we enjoyed great observations of Erect-crested Penguins, Rockhopper Penguins, Antipodes Parakeets, Reischek’s Parakeets, and Antipodean Albatross.

With everyone back aboard by late afternoon, our Captain took us on a circumnavigation of Bollons Island and the main Antipodes Island, while Hamish informed and entertained

us with geological anecdotes. It was a magical time of fantastic light, landscape, seascape, wildlife, and comradery. On a voyage with so many highlights, this was added near the top of many lists.

The day continued with a recap and briefing, dinner, and the usual after-dinner activities still in the magical golden glow. At some point, the sun set, and we headed to bed to prepare for tomorrow's adventure. Friday the 13th proved to be super lucky for us.



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Day 12

Saturday, 14 December 2024

Bounty Islands

The distance from the Antipodes to the Bounty Islands is short, so *Heritage Adventurer* was at anchor by dawn, and the first group headed down the gangway at 0600. In the calm, safe, organised manner that we have come to expect, the gangway gang and expedition team delivered us safely into the Zodiacs in challenging conditions as we set off for a cruise through this unique place. Once again, only the 'Heritage Way' made it possible – with a small part of the credit going to us as intrepid adventurers.

What a cruise it was! We added the Bounty Islands to the stunning collection of wildlife hotspots visited. Each has been unique, but the Bounty Islands are somehow further outside the mainstream than the others. This small collection of windswept and wave-battered rocks is literally covered with wildlife – which spills over and fills the air and the sea as well. The clouds of Albatross circling overhead and the enormous rafts of various birds on the sea, made this an experience like no other.

The 130-million-year-old granite provided a dramatic stage for the show. The Salvin's Albatross, Erect Crested Penguins and New Zealand Fur Seals were the stars, but the rest of the cast was varied and abundant. We saw the endemic Bounty Island Shag, Cape Petrels, Fulmar (and other) Prions, Antarctic Terns, Giant Petrels, Diving Petrels, and numerous other species. It was well worth the early start.

We were back aboard our trusty expedition vessel by 1030, but the show did not stop, as we were in convoy with several seabirds around us for most of the day. We relocated from the decks and into the lounge, as the education programme began with Steve Howell and Phil talking about Petrels and Storm Petrels.

After lunch, Steve Bradley, Steve Todd and Jamie held a workshop on Getting the Most from your SLR Camera before Mike Bell prepared us for our next destination with his talk Re-discovery and Conservation Success of the Chatham Islands Taiko. To cap the afternoon, Daisy showed the highlights of her 20-year photography career in Polar Voices.

So, another extraordinary day concluded with our normal routine: an excellent dinner, Bird Club, beverages, and a satisfied slumber.



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Day 13

Sunday, 15 December 2024

Chatham Islands

We enjoyed a quiet morning as we sailed to The Pyramid at the southern boundary of The Chatham Islands. The fog cleared to high cloud as our Captain undertook several circumnavigations of this impressive volcanic remnant while Chatham Albatross wheeled overhead, and Hamish and Mike explained the geology and biology.

Because we had made better-than-expected progress, our Zodiac cruise at Southeast Island was pushed forward. Again, we split into groups with lunch before or after the cruise. South East Island is a predator-free sanctuary, so we enjoyed sensational sightings of Shore Plover, Pitt Island Shag and Red-crowned Parakeets. A very lucky few caught a glimpse of the once near-extinct Black Robin.

We relocated to Mangere and Little Mangere Islands where Mike and Rod shared the story of the rescue of the Black Robin, and pointed out the exact areas where the drama took place – including the remarkable track up and down Little Mangere with the very few remaining birds carried by Rod, Brian Bell (Mike's Dad) and others including one of Heritage Expeditions founders Rodney Russ. While there, our Captain brought *Heritage Adventurer* in close as we headed out on the decks with spotting scopes and cameras. Many successful sightings of the Chatham Islands Parakeet were made.

We held our briefing early so those interested in hopeful Tāiko spotting could eat hotdogs at the bistro and relocate to Deck 8. The rest of us had a more substantial meal in the dining room, then joined the party or did our own thing.

Mike had told us that the Chatham's are better than the Subantarctic – maybe he was right?



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Day 14

Monday, 16 December 2024

Chatham Island

Today was the day that *Heritage Adventurer* arrived at Chatham Island. Each of us had our plan for how to spend the day – so off we went. We got to visit one, two, or all of the main sites of interest – the Sweetwater Tāiko Sanctuary for a close encounter with this endangered bird and to support the effort to aid its recovery; the nearby Awatotara Nature Reserve for birding and exploring the re-generating native bush; driving through the countryside to get a feeling of local life; the Blue Cod and Chips lunch at the nearby hotel for another view of local life; the Admiral Gardens to celebrate and enjoy the amazing work of Lois and Val; checking out the local shops and sights; and everything in between.

We made the most of every opportunity while the expedition team provided the transport – even driving vans and coaches instead of Zodiacs. As we cruised away, our Captain took us in closer to the dramatic volcanic tuff cliffs for a parting view of a Chatham Island Shag colony. We continued along the coast to The Horns for another chance to observe Tāiko.

Over dinner, we set our course over the open sea, toward Bluff.



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Day 15
Tuesday, 17 December 2024
At sea enroute to Bluff

The first of our two days at sea on the way home started with a sleep-in and a leisurely breakfast. The first item on the programme was Mike Gottfried's talk on Climate Change: What is Happening Now? Rod followed with Part 2 of Island Magic: How Plants and Animals Reach Islands and How Island Living Changes Them in Unimaginable Ways; a delightful and quirky look at how and why life on islands differs from life on continents.

The first signs of the impending end to this voyage were our Expedition Team confirming our departure plans and the return of the rubber boots and Zodiac life jackets. Still, there was more to do, with David giving a Watercolour Studio and Demo and an insightful Chatham Islands Panel Discussion with our resident gurus Mike Bell, Hamish and Rod. Possibly the highlight of the day, and certainly the most fun, was Let's Get Quizzical hosted by the irrepressible Phil.

The sea state gradually calmed, and the visibility improved throughout the day, so by afternoon, the birders were in the lounge chairs on the aft decks again. There was some activity, but the mood was of gentle reflection and preparation. Some energy was injected after dinner with Bill at the keyboard and the celebration of Mike Bell's birthday and Phil's wedding anniversary.

Day 16

Wednesday 18 December 2024

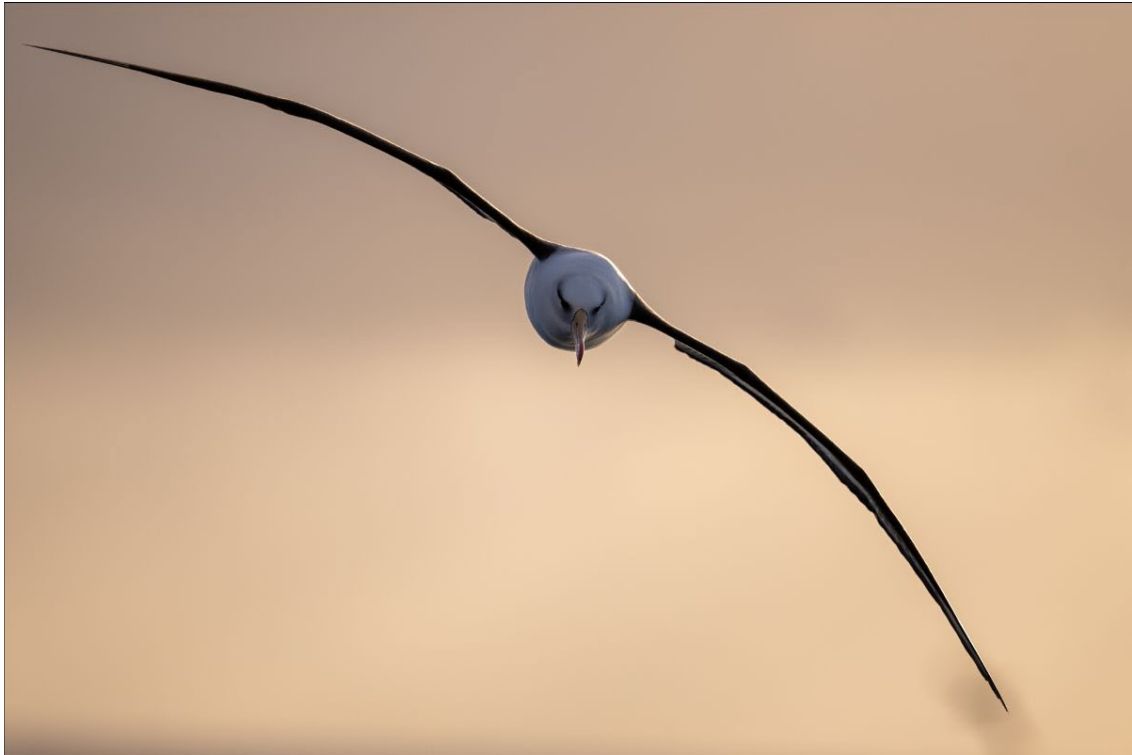
At sea enroute to Bluff

Our second day at sea continued the gentle ride from the previous afternoon. The morning was for personal time – a long leisurely breakfast, packing, photo sorting, or a cuppa with friends.

The first educational activity was Pam's interesting counterfactual Consider what Charles Darwin would have witnessed had he visited the Subantarctic instead of the Galapagos. Our last lunch aboard was every bit as good as the first and made us reflect that we would soon need to do our own shopping, cooking, and washing up. We enjoyed the fine conditions to spend more time outside before joining David for his Watercolour Studio. To wrap up an incredible education programme was Nigel Marven with A Life of Wildlife Filmmaking.

After one last shot at the shop for souvenirs, we joined Captain Jasek for Captain's Farewell Cocktails and to give a huge round of applause to the teams that have served us so well. We then had a look back at our adventures with Steve Bradley's superb voyage slideshow. We have done so much, and our friends and families will be thrilled to view this taste of it.

It was hard to shake the bittersweet feeling, but after Captain's Farewell Dinner, we filled the lounge for one more chance to share memories, exchange contacts, and laugh.



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Day 17

Thursday, 19 December 2024

Bluff

Today was the time to farewell staff, crew, and fellow travellers after a marvellous journey exploring these remote southerly islands. Sailing out of Bluff sixteen days ago felt like a lifetime ago, with so many experiences, wildlife, and wilderness between then and now.

We of the Heritage Expeditions team have loved sharing our passion and knowledge with you. Thank you for travelling with Heritage Expeditions. We wish you safe onward travels and joyful homecomings. Stay safe, and may we see you on the high seas again someday.



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