



BIRDING DOWN UNDER

on board HERITAGE ADVENTURER

3 - 19 December 2022



Dear Adventurer,

Thank you for choosing to travel with Heritage Expeditions aboard our new expedition ship *Heritage Adventurer* on our ultimate Subantarctic Island adventure Birding Down Under.

We hope you enjoy reliving your voyage when reading the Expedition Log from your voyage.

Yours in adventure,

The Heritage Expeditions Team

Day 1

Saturday 3 December: Queenstown

After having arrived from all corners near and far, the first day of our 'Birding Down Under' adventure starts with checking in at our Queenstown accommodation where we get a first glimpse of one another and our Expedition Team as we get to know each other over an introductory dinner.

Day 2

Sunday 4 December: Bluff

The excitement of pending adventure built up everyone's expectations as we arrived at Bluff. *Heritage Adventurer* staff and crew welcomed us on board and our Expedition Leader Cheli Larsen introduced everyone to the ship, voyage programme and the Expedition Team.

It was a time for us to explore our new home for the next 16 days.

We received our compulsory safety briefing followed by a lifeboat drill and, just after 1800, we cleared Bluff Harbour. After a great dinner we set off to bed sailing to the Snares Islands.



© A. Woods, Heritage Expeditions

Day 3

Monday 5 December: The Snares Islands and beyond

We successfully crossed the watery strait between Stewart Island and our objective - the Snares Islands. After filling up on breakfast, the Expedition Team readied the Zodiacs with Yuri Martynov's expert guidance. Our anticipation grew as we wondered if whether North East Island would afford sufficient shelter to enable us to explore its eastern coast by Zodiac. Cheli's 0730 announcement filled us with hope, telling us that the temperature was 11°C, the wind steady and the swell moderate. The morning light was in our favour and the weather gods prevailed - no rain.

Our Zodiacs were deployed by 0915 and we all set about filling our memory cards with 2 hours of seriously wonderful bird watching interspersed with other natural features such as Snares Granite, luxuriant native bush, sea lions, Southern Fur Seals, Snares Islands Tomtits and Fernbirds, fantails, well combed brown algae, an inky sea and surprisingly confident, happy, large local communities of Snares Crested Penguins and Cape Petrels.

Safely ship-board again with Zodiacs stowed, we set off at 1115 to the southwest passing Broughton Island, Vancouver Rock and then the five islets that make up the Western Chain. Hamish Campbell explained a little of the geology of The Snares: a tale of two plutons, an older Broughton Granite (115 million years old) and a much more voluminous Snares Granite

(110 million years old), of comparable age to the mid-Cretaceous chalk exposed in the White Cliffs of Dover. Just before we knew it, it was time for lunch.

After lunch we listened to Peter Ryan's enlightening talk about 'Seabirds of the Southern Ocean', or 'Why don't penguins have gills?'. After we indulged in the serious business of biosecurity: we thoroughly checked all of our personal gear before going ashore at the Auckland Islands. No stray rodents or insects were found, all seeds and bacteria were driven elsewhere. Eyes, fingers, tweezers, brushes, vacuums, seedicides, forms and signatures were out in force. Mission accomplished.

We then enjoyed recaps of the day provided by Ian Jansma on pinnipeds (eared seals), and Cheli Larsen, Chris Todd and Mike Sylvia explained what we might expect to see on Enderby Island, our next stop in the Auckland Islands tomorrow.

Captain Hans Soderholm was our host to a Welcome Cocktail Drink at 1900 where he made a fine speech and introduced key members of his management team before we all enjoyed another spectacular dining experience.



© A. Woods, Heritage Expeditions



© C. Todd Heritage Expeditions



© A. Woods, Heritage Expeditions



© A. Woods, Heritage Expeditions

Day 4

Tuesday 6 December: Enderby Island

Heritage Adventurer arrived this morning at the Auckland Islands, the largest of New Zealand's Subantarctic island groups. We anchored in the protected waters of Port Ross, in the north of the archipelago. From our breakfast tables, we had extraordinary views of the columnar basalt formations on the north side of the harbour.

Today we had the choice of three activities on and around Enderby Island. The most immersive and strenuous was a full-day, 15 kilometre loop hike around the island's eastern coast and then along a boardwalk crossing the centre of the island. Another way to spend all day ashore was to opt for the shorter there-and-back hike to the island's northern cliffs via the boardwalk. At 0830, those on either of the full-day options collected packed lunches before boarding Zodiac to Sandy Bay, on the south side of the island to start our adventures. The third option, for those of us not wishing to spend the full day ashore, was to take a Zodiac cruise at 1000 and then to go ashore after lunch on board *Heritage Adventurer*.

Those of us on the Zodiac cruise encountered windy conditions on the way to the island but found protection from wind-driven spray in the little coves at the foot of basalt cliffs. In the coves, we found the endemic Auckland Islands Shag nesting in abundance. Nearby, in the copious kelp beds, we were delighted to find a few pairs of the endemic Auckland Islands Teal, a beautiful brown flightless duck.

Flying above us were Giant Petrels, Brown Skuas, Southern Royal Albatross, and Light-mantled Sooty Albatross. Antarctic Terns and Red-billed Gulls were also in attendance. In the water, we spotted some Yellow-eyed Penguins/Hoiho and enjoyed the company of

Hooker's/New Zealand Sea Lions swimming alongside the Zodiacs.

Meanwhile, the 'long hikers' among us enjoyed the varied scenery and habitats of Enderby Island's rugged coastline from a different perspective. We also sighted a great many birds, including the endemic Auckland Island Snipe. On the north end of the island, we had a view over Derry Castle Reef, where a ship of that name wrecked in 1887.

The 'short hikers' spent an amazing day enjoying the flora and birdlife along the boardwalk and at Sandy Bay. This option gave us plenty of time to contemplate the beauty and resilience of nature, which is thriving after the removal of all invasive land mammals from the island. Along the boardwalk, which was also the last section of the long hike, we discovered rich grasslands where the megaherb Ross Lily *Bulbinella rossii* was blooming bright yellow in every direction. Nesting were many Southern Royal Albatross, who soared alongside Light-mantled Sooty Albatross above their pristine island sanctuary.

In the forests and meadows surrounding Sandy Bay, where all three groups met again in the afternoon, we found numerous Red-crowned Parakeets along with Tui, Bellbird, Auckland Islands Tomtit, and New Zealand Pipit. The final two hours of the landing were filled with wildlife-watching and photography, as several dozen Hooker's/New Zealand Sea Lions frolicked on the beach and many Yellow-eyed Penguins/Hoiho crossed the meadow between the forest and the sea. Frenzied sea lion activity and crashing surf made getting back into the Zodiacs at the end of the day an adventure in itself. Throughout it all, the weather remained as good as it gets, with mostly sunny skies and moderate breezes ashore and we were all back on board *Heritage Adventurer* by 1900.

The day ended with a particularly delicious dinner and good evening conversation after our huge day at Enderby Island. It is hard to imagine how a day can get any better than today.



© A. Woods, Heritage Expeditions



© M. Sylvia, Heritage Expeditions



© A.Woods, Heritage Expeditions

Day 5

Wednesday 7 December: At Sea

Our first full sea day on board *Heritage Adventurer* was a great chance to enjoy a sleep in, especially for those of us that went on the full day 15 kilometre walk at Enderby Island yesterday.

We awoke to surprisingly calm seas with relatively low wind of about 6 knots and a swell of 2 metres. This was a blessing for those of us that suffer from sea sickness and knew the

reputation this stretch of the Southern Ocean has.

Despite the long walk the previous day the birders among us were up early, as always, to stand on the decks ready and waiting to see what birds the open sea would offer us. Throughout the day, we saw a collection of amazing sea birds, including a few albatross species such as Campbell, Black-browed, Wandering and Southern Royal. We also saw the Antarctic Prion, Sooty Shearwater, White-chinned Petrel and Black-bellied Storm Petrel.

During our day at sea we were treated to a number of presentations by our Expedition Team beginning with resident birder, Peter Ryan, who presented his talk on the 'Ever Popular Penguins'.

Later in the morning, at 1100, we had another presentation, this time on 'Marine Mammals of the Southern Ocean' by Ian Jansma before it was time to take a break and dig into another great lunch and more bird watching.

After lunch it was time to get back into the lecture theatre and enjoy Andy Wood's presentation on 'Adventure Travel Photography'.

This was followed by our second biosecurity screening of the voyage. Once again, we cleaned through all of our gear with a fine-toothed comb (quite literally) and received the all clear from our Expedition Team inspectors.



© Mike S, Heritage Expeditions

At 1700 it was time for our final lecture of the day. This was a presentation on the geology of New Zealand and the Subantarctic Islands. The word 'geology' normally strikes boredom and fear into most people, but with Hamish Campbell's charisma and enthusiasm our minds raced with excitement of the many formations and structures we would soon encounter.

To finish off the day, our Expedition leader Cheli Larsen briefed all the guests in the lounge

on tomorrow's adventure at Macquarie Island for what was expected to be a big day ahead.

Day 6

Thursday 8 December: Macquarie Island

Today we crossed into Australian waters heading for Macquarie Island or "Macca" as the island is known to locals/rangers who live here.

Early in the morning the Captain dropped anchor at Sandy Bay on the east coast. At 34 kilometres long and 5 kilometres wide, Macquarie is a mere speck in the vastness of the Southern Ocean. As we disembarked our Zodiacs and walked up the pebbly beach we were greeted by King Penguins, Royal Penguins and huge Elephant Seals. At a similar latitude to the South Atlantic island of South Georgia, Macquarie was living up to its reputation as a smaller version of that remarkable island.

The inquisitive King Penguins with their beautiful orange plumage came to see who these new two-legged creatures were to their island. Weaner Elephant Seals, their mothers and younger males rolled over to view us with their saucer-like eyes. Some adolescents started fights preparing for what would become the contest of their lives in future seasons.

To the southern end of the beach we followed the boardwalk up to the lookout over the Royal Penguin colony. Everywhere in this amazing 40,000 bird colony something was happening. Mating rituals, chicks being reared and fed, youngsters being scolded, all the while skua swooped above looking for an opportunity.

To the northern end of the beach King Penguins with their zither-like calls crowded the beach. There appeared an endless procession of these birds back and forth into the surf for feeding.

As the last of us left the beach at the end of day, few would disagree with famous Australian explorer Douglas Mawson's assessment of Macquarie as "*... one of the wonder spots of the world.*"



© A. Woods, Heritage Expeditions



© A. Woods, Heritage Expeditions



© A. Woods, Heritage Expeditions



© A. Woods, Heritage Expeditions



© C. Todd, Heritage Expeditions



© Heritage Expeditions

Day 7

Friday 9 December: Macquarie Island

The second day at Macquarie dawned with a pleasant but moody overcast sky and a cool southerly breeze. Penguins and an array of sea birds cruised by as we raised the anchor and

set off to our next destination, Lusitania Bay. Situated at the southeastern end of the Island, this area is known for being home to Rockhopper and King Penguins.

Soon after arrival we were out in the Zodiacs cruising the rugged coastline viewing the penguin colonies along the shoreline. Incredibly the colonies extend along way up on the steep hill sides. Penguins regularly swam up to our Zodiacs as we cruised along, with Giant Petrels swooping over the colonies looking for an opportune meal.

One and a half hours later we returned to the ship and set course again. This time northward to the Isthmus and the Australian National Antarctic Research Expeditions (ANARE) station at the top end of Macquarie Island. And of course, not forgetting a delicious lunch on the way.

Our afternoon plan here was to visit Gentoo and Rockhopper Penguin colonies near the station. Things were looking good with sun starting peak through the cloud and blue skies appearing. However, an unpredictable swell on the shoreline and landing beach unfortunately made it too hazardous for us to safely land on the exposed beach. Somewhat disappointing but understandable as safety comes first with expedition cruising.

With our departure from Macquarie we were treated with sunshine, flat seas and spectacular views of Macquarie before setting course for Campbell Island. To top things off we were entertained by Light-mantled Sooty Albatross often in synchronised flight with their beautiful white eye-line as they circled the ship along with prions darting about in the setting sun, such a great way to end a day of exploration.



© A. Woods, Heritage Expeditions



© A. Woods, Heritage Expeditions



© A. Woods, Heritage Expeditions

Day 8

Saturday 10 December: At Sea

The near calm weather continued, providing glassy seas ideal for spotting cetaceans, but not particularly conducive to stirring seabirds into action. The early risers were rewarded with a pod of Arnoux's Beaked Whales and a school of Dusky Dolphins before breakfast. Birds were few and far between in the deep waters southwest of Zealandia. As a result, attendance at the two morning lectures was good. First Peter Ryan talked about the biology of albatrosses, explaining how they make a living at sea, and critically assessing the claim they 'mate for life'. He highlighted the 14 albatrosses that regularly occur in New Zealand, including 10 species that only breed in the region. Question time was cut short by a sighting of more dolphins off the starboard side of the ship.

At 1100, Tim Jarvis gave a gripping account of his repeat of Douglas Mawson's epic trek across East Antarctica during the Australian Antarctic Expedition of 1911-1914. Using the same equipment and food resources as Mawson, he completed the trip without dogs in 47 days, the same number of days as Mawson. Along the way he lost more than 30 kilograms!

After lunch, Andy Wood gave a wealth of practical insights and tips to improve our photographic skills. Then it was time for another biosecurity check ahead of tomorrow's visit to Campbell Island. This was followed by Chris Todd's introduction to Campbell Island, with a focus in the island's diverse flora. Recaps ahead of tomorrow's briefing reported on the island Coast Watch during World War II as well as an overview of the various tools used to track seabirds at sea.

Despite the small numbers of birds, the keen birders managed to amass a respectable species list for the day, including five species of albatross, four petrels, two shearwaters, two storm petrels, a Common Diving Petrel, the obligatory Antarctic Prions as well as a couple of Brown Skuas and a group of four Rockhopper Penguins far from land. A few die-hards sighted another group of beaked whales just before the evening briefing.

The calm conditions were ideal for spotting floating debris – several patches of drifting kelp were observed, often accompanied by Grey-backed Storm Petrels, which mainly feed on the larvae of goose barnacles. A highlight was the absence of any man-made debris. The Southern Ocean lived up to its reputation of being the world's cleanest ocean, with no litter seen on the trip so far.



© M. Sylvia, Heritage Expeditions



© A. Woods, Heritage Expeditions



© A. Woods, Heritage Expeditions



© A. Woods, Heritage Expeditions

Day 9

Sunday December 11: Campbell Island

We arrived late morning to Campbell Island and entered Perseverance Harbour with flat seas and no wind, a beautiful sail. Captain Hans positioned the ship close to the weather station base and we enjoyed the views while having breakfast.

Today's activities included three options to explore the Island. The weather was the key for many with perfect calm, bright, and comfortable conditions.

Option 1 was a long hike up to the summit of the tallest peak on Campbell, Mt Honey, and 37 intrepid hikers were shuttled to the landing all the way up into Garden Cove to start off.

Option 2 was a 3½ hour Zodiac cruise along the harbour shores then out of the bay and into the open sea. Geology and wildlife were all in their splendour. Hooker's/New Zealand Sea Lions, New Zealand Fur Seals, Giant Petrels, Campbell Island Teals, Light-mantled Sooty Albatross on nests, and many others were enjoyed. Once we cleared the bay, the cliffs along our route towered 150 metres above the sea.

Great examples of the geological forces that formed the island were very visible and Hamish, our on board geologist, brought it all into context over the radios for all. Five species of albatross, Sooty Shearwaters, and Antarctic Terns were in abundance well offshore and with the great conditions some ventured out. Those that did enjoyed albatross only a metre or two above their heads and shearwaters and terns diving around the Zodiac. Yellow-eyed/Hoiho and Eastern Rockhopper Penguins were also observed swimming around Zodiacs in the deep waters.

The final option included a shorter version of the Zodiac cruise staying in the bay and enjoying all of the same.

After lunch on board by all but the long hikers, who had taken a packed lunch on their adventure, many were shuttled to the shore to go on the boardwalk hike. This began at the weather station base and continued up to the top where Southern Royal Albatrosses were nesting close to the trail. Some were lucky to view the elusive Campbell Island Snipe, an island endemic. All were temporarily halted on the way up as we encountered a pair of Hooker's/New Zealand Sea Lions up high on the hill. She refused to move, and the male would not leave her side so we let them be and rerouted, expedition style, to enjoy the sights.

When all were back on board Captain Hans set sail out of the bay. One last treat was to sail close to the cliffs at Bull Rock to be amazed by Campbell's massive albatross colony. It looked like snow on the cliffs with thousands of nesting albatross on the ground and in the air. A spectacle of nature.



© Annika, Heritage Expeditions



© Heritage Expeditions



© Heritage Expeditions



© Heritage Expeditions



© J. Mishina, Heritage Expeditions

Day 10

Wednesday 12 December: At Sea

Today was a full day at sea on our way to the Antipodes Islands. Some of us welcomed a break after the high-octane day at Campbell Island yesterday. However, this was anything but a day of rest.

The full educational program started at 0930 with a presentation from Hamish entitled, 'Geology of the Antipodes and Bounty Islands'. Here we learned all about the fascinating geological history of these remote Subantarctic Island groups, along with a refresher of Geology 101.

At 1100 it was time for another presentation by adventurer and filmmaker Tim Jarvis. This time he thrilled us with tales of his re-enactment of Ernest Shackleton's legendary open boat voyage from Elephant Island to South Georgia, as well as his traverse of the South Georgia mountains, to raise awareness of climate change.

After lunch, at 1400, we were treated by our on board photographer Andy to an enlightening workshop on post processing. The tips and tricks we learned will be helpful when it comes time to process the thousands of photos we have taken in the past week.

A special afternoon tea was served at 1530 by our amazing hotel team in the lounge. As if there weren't enough to eat on *Heritage Adventurer*, we gobbled up the savoury snacks and

delectable sweets. The educational program was rounded off by Peter at 1700 with his presentation entitled, 'Pirates, Shags, and Things that Go Bump in the Night'.

For those of us who preferred to spend the day on deck, it turned out to be a particularly good day for seabird spotting: 10 different species of albatross were seen, along with numerous species of petrel and prion. A pod of Long-finned Pilot Whales also made an appearance alongside the ship.

At 1900, we learned all about the plans for tomorrow at the recap and briefing. Dinner conversation was marked by heightened excitement at the tantalising prospect of exploring two of the least visited island groups in the Subantarctic – the Antipodes and the Bounty Islands – over the next two days. The excitement of our Expedition Team was also evident, as these far-flung island groups are on the schedule of *Heritage Adventurer* only once per year. After dinner, the gentle rolling of the ship lulled us to a restful sleep filled with dreams of all the elusive endemic birds we hoped to see in the coming days.



© M. Sylvia, Heritage Expeditions

Day 11

Tuesday 13 December: Antipodes Islands

After a day at sea, we awoke rested and reinvigorated to a fine day with easy seas and a gentle to moderate wind. Looking promising! The Antipodes Islands grew bigger as we approached, much grander and more imposing than most of us were expecting. We sailed up the east side, from the south, and found an excellent anchorage between Bollons Island and Anchorage Bay. Following breakfast, we were raring to go and explore in the Zodiacs.

With no landing allowed, it was easy going from a biosecurity perspective. Off we went!

We first explored the coast in and adjacent to Anchorage Bay, north towards Perpendicular Point and south towards Reef Point. A couple of human residents were seen rooted to the spot and looking forlornly at *Heritage Adventurer* and our flotilla of Zodiacs loaded with colourful human beings. We then visited Bollons Island enjoying the wildlife, especially the penguin colonies, and grand coastal topography.

Spotting parakeets in the distance became an all-consuming sport along with the hardest bird for penguin fanciers to see - the Erect-crested Penguin, which is only found here and on the Bounty Islands. Hanging out for more, we revisited Anchorage Bay and Reef Point area on Antipodes Island.

Lunch was next on board, and then we steamed south to a new anchorage off Ring Dove Bay. Here we pretty much all got to see at least two species of parakeet. Well-sated, we set off for a wonderful clockwise circumnavigation (almost) of Antipodes Island and headed north off the dramatic cathedral-like Windward Islands bound for the Bounty Islands.



© A. Woods, Heritage Expeditions

The cliffs, caves and shore platforms looked amazing. All comprised of volcanic rock associated with the eruption of the Antipodes Volcano about 300,000 years ago. This is a VERY youthful volcano! It is by far the youngest volcanic island within the Subantarctic Islands. The Auckland Islands volcanoes (Carnley and Ross) are between 24 and 12 million years old and Campbell Island Volcano is between 11 and 6 million years old. In terms of Hamish's simplistic 'milk and cream' description (analogy) of oceanic and continental crust, all three volcanic islands that we have visited are basalt, hence you could say they represent 'spilt milk' that has found its way on top of the 'cream' i.e. continental crust of the Campbell Plateau in Southern Zealandia. The actual rock surfaces displayed lots of variety and

complexity. Most of the rock has a sedimentary look and is pyroclastic, in other words 'broken while hot'. Explosive volcanism is responsible. We saw plenty of lava flows, some with columnar cooling structure. We also saw some curious intrusive lavas that had been squeezed up vertical fractures to form dykes and/or horizontal fractures to form sills.

All in all, we had a most splendid day with wonderful sunny weather and balmy temperatures. What a treat! The wildlife was amazing and the geology unforgettable.



© Heritage Expeditions

Day 12

Wednesday, 14 December: Bounty Islands

Heritage Adventurer arrived this morning at the Bounty Islands, the smallest and northernmost of New Zealand's five Subantarctic island groups. It should be said rather, that we were told we had arrived at the Bounty Islands, but an impenetrable veil of fog prevented us from confirming this with our eyes.

Nevertheless, our Expedition Leader was undeterred as she reaffirmed our plans to explore these remote islets, if conditions were determined to be favourable. Fog was not the only possible impediment to our plans. Indeed, our expectations had already been set appropriately by the daily program: "IF IF IF swell, waves and wind permit, we will board Zodiacs to explore, with the chance to see Salvin's Mollymawk, the Bounty Island Shag, Snares Cape Petrels, Fulmar Prions, Erect-crested Penguins and one or two of the Bounties' 20,000 New Zealand Fur Seals."

After breakfast, which was earlier than usual, we stood together on the outer decks in muted excitement, straining our vision as ghostly dark shapes appeared and were quickly swallowed by fog. On the breeze, over the rumbling of engines as the ship manoeuvred to

find a suitable anchor position, we could faintly hear the clamour of thousands of otherworldly voices, like unseen Sirens. Before we knew it, the gangway was fitted, Zodiacs were launched, and we were asked to prepare ourselves for an adventure.

After carefully embarking the Zodiacs in wavy conditions, we set off. There was silence in the Zodiacs as the ship disappeared behind us and only fog stood before and all around us. We lost our sense of time and distance as we left our known world behind. Ahead, we finally discerned different shades in the endless palette of grey. Shades slowly resolved into shape and motion, which finally became rocky islands, each standing in its own tempest of foaming white waves. As we made our final approach, the shapeshifting islands revealed their true nature.

When is an island not an island? When its surface is more fur and feathers than stone, when it takes to the air and water on countless wings and flippers, when it speaks the echoed tones of ten thousand avian voices. We saw an ever-moving throng of birds and seals join rock, sea and sky as one indivisible living entity. Galaxies of albatross whirled above vast nesting colonies at the tops of the tallest islands. Closer to the precipitous shorelines, legions of scrambling penguins emerged and disappeared into the undulating waves. Amongst all of this birdlife were thousands of fur seals of all ages and sizes, from stalwart males to the tiniest pups. In the presence of such a panoply of wildlife, we found it challenging to single out any individual for closer scrutiny. After trying for some time to capture the scene in our cameras, many of us gave up. Or rather, we gave ourselves over to an experience that cannot be transformed into megabytes, and we instead let ourselves be transformed by it.

As the 90-minute Zodiac cruise progressed, the fog gradually cleared to reveal more and more islands, each home to even more wildlife than the last. Though every inch of shoreline was fringed with flowing strands of bull kelp, not a single plant could be seen on the imposing faces of granite. We had just enough time to explore the main group of islands in detail before the fog started to close in again, like divine breath on the window pane of our perception. Again, before we knew it, we were back on *Heritage Adventurer*. The islands were gone, disappeared back into their hidden world, but remaining forever in our memory.

After lunch, the afternoon was given over to Hamish, who gave two presentations. The first was about the history of the Chatham Islands, the second about their geology. At the recap and briefing, Peter told us about the special birds we should look out for tomorrow at The Pyramid and South East Island. We went to sleep feeling immensely satisfied with the day, having seen everything we set out to see.



© A. Woods, Heritage Expeditions



© A. Woods, Heritage Expeditions



© A. Woods, Heritage Expeditions



© A. Woods, Heritage Expeditions

Day 13

Thursday 15 December: Pyramid Rock and South East Island

Day 13 on Birding Down Under brought us another great day of amazing locations and wildlife, and to top it off, our luck with the weather seems to be unbreakable on this voyage.

We awoke to low cloud, but no real wind or rain. In fact, our Captain announced we only had a 1 metre swell and 20 knot winds.

At 0830, through the low cloud and circling Chatham Albatross, we could start to make out a large ominous shape in the distance, Pyramid Rock. This was our first destination of the day.

All guests were out on deck in the morning to view this amazingly rugged pyramid shape sticking out of the sea. Here we witnessed the only known breeding colony of Chatham Albatross. The birders among us spotted, not only these albatross, but also Northern Royal Albatross, Cape Petrels, White-fronted Terns, Sooty Shearwaters and Skuas.

Captain Hans was able to circle the rock formation both clockwise and anti-clockwise, so guests from every vantage point enjoyed incredible views.

Upon arriving at our afternoon location, South East Island, our Expedition Leader, Cheli, was able to arrange for the keen birders to begin their Zodiac cruise early. There was a lot of excited chatter about what endemics we would find on this island. At 1200, the 43 keen twitchers set off for their three-hour Zodiac tour of the island. They were joined at 1300 by the guests who were taking the Zodiac cruise at a more leisurely pace. Our Zodiac cruise fully circumnavigated South East Island, and along the way we spotted Pitt Island Shags, Shore Plovers, Chatham Island Oystercatchers, Skuas, White-fronted Terns, Red-capped Parakeets and even a Little Blue Penguin. There were many New Zealand Fur Seals playing in the water around the Zodiacs, which entertained those of us not glued to binoculars.

In the evening Captain Hans and Cheli arranged for a ship cruise near The Horns, a known flight path of the endangered Chatham Island Taiko/Magenta Petrel. From 1900 until dark, the ship cruised around this area looking for the elusive bird. Many guests were out on deck keen to catch a glimpse of this Taiko, but unfortunately the effort was unsuccessful.

An early night was in store for most of us, as it's an early start for our final excursion of the voyage tomorrow at Chatham Island.



© A .Woods, Heritage Expeditions



© J. Mishina, Heritage Expeditions



© M. Sylvia, Heritage Expeditions



© A. Woods, Heritage Expeditions

Day 14

Friday 16 December: Chatham Islands

Heritage Adventurer dropped anchor off Waitangi, Chatham Islands, marking our first encounter with other people since we'd left Macquarie and our last landing. As we disembarked the Zodiacs on Waitangi fishing wharf we eased into a flexible approach to the day's itinerary, we were now on island time.

The first group to leave on the buses headed to the Taiko Trust Reserve. For some of us to see the Chatham Island Taiko/Magenta Petrel in its burrow was an expedition highlight. Equally as impressive as the bird itself has been the conservation effort, patience and perseverance that has ensured the future of this bird. The Trust's work is an inspiration and shows what can be done to ensure endangered species can endure.

For others, exploring the Awatotara Reserve it was a chance to see Chatham Island Pigeons, Red-crowned Parakeets, Chatham Warbler, Tui and fantails. The afternoon was spent visiting the small settlement of Waitangi and chat to locals. The Store, Café and River Onion Gallery was enjoyed by many of us. The recently opened Museum was another highlight with well laid out and lit artefact displays tracing the history of the Chatham Islands from early human settlement to modern day.

Back on board *Heritage Adventurer* Captain Hans pulled anchor and we set sail for Bluff. The wind swept Chathams disappeared in the sea mist and it felt a privilege to briefly experience life on New Zealand's eastern most island.



© M. Sylvia, Heritage Expeditions



© A. Woods, Heritage Expeditions

Day 15

Saturday 17 December: At Sea – Chatham Islands to Bluff

We awoke to dense fog and calm seas to relax after an awesome day on Chatham Island. It was great to catch our breath, so to speak, and to review the many photos or catch up on some reading and enjoy the many amenities aboard *Heritage Adventurer*. Guests throughout the day enjoyed ample opportunity to rest weary muscles in the sauna, Jacuzzi, spa and gym.

After breakfast we had an informative and interesting presentation delivered by Peter on evolution and extinction on islands, along with information about land bird diversity. This was followed by the amazing story of Marcus and his two adventuring acquaintances who kayaked around the rugged island of South Georgia - finishing just in time for lunch.

During the afternoon we had time look out for wildlife and enjoy a special afternoon tea as we cruised south westward to Bluff. Hamish gave a great presentation on the origin of New Zealand plants and animals and in evening we had a recap by Cheli and team followed by dinner.

Another relaxing day on board *Heritage Adventurer* to round of an exciting voyage.



© A. Woods, Heritage Expeditions



© A. Woods, Heritage Expeditions

Day 16

Sunday 18 December: At Sea -- Chatham Islands to Bluff

The final day at sea passed largely uneventfully. Most people were slow to rise after a festive evening the previous day. In the first talk of the day, Peter Ryan gave a presentation on plastics in the oceans which challenged many of the myths perpetuated by the mainstream media about the severity of the plastics problem. Although it has been evident since the early 1990s that waste plastics pose a significant threat to marine ecosystems, their impact is much less than that of industrial fishing and climate change. The talk was followed by a lively debate among the audience.

After tea, Chris Todd and Delight Gartlein gave a presentation on the plans to eradicate pigs, cats and mice from Auckland Island, New Zealand's fifth largest island. Only the narrow Victoria Passage separates Auckland Island from Adams Island, the largest predator-free island in New Zealand, which is home to most of the world's Gibson's Albatross and Auckland Island Rails, as well as countless other birds, invertebrates and plants. There is thus an urgent need to deal with the introduced predators on Auckland Island before they have the chance to reach Adams Island.

Birding was slow throughout much of the day, so many birders attended Mike Sylvia's final list update and presentation on using eBird to contribute citizen science data to a growing global database. This was followed by a screening of a video on extreme skiing in the New Zealand alps in the Darwin Theatre.

At 1600, Cheli revealed which expedition team members were linked to the unlikely list of personal statements handed out last night, which stimulated much debate among team and expedition members alike. With a possible 14 points up for grabs, the spoils were shared by two expeditioners who managed 7 correct answers each. The best any of the team could manage was 5 correct answers, despite have the advantage of knowing the answer to at least one statement!

As we reached the shelf edge, bird diversity finally started picking up, and crew and passengers alike enjoyed the many Dusky Dolphins that frolicked alongside the ship. At 1830, we all got dressed up for farewell cocktails hosted by Captain Hans in the Deck 5 Lounge. And after a final festive supper, we headed back to the lounge for the screening of Andy Wood's expedition slide show, which showcased the highlights of the last 15 days at sea. As Andy noted, it felt more like a month since we were at the Snares!



© A. Woods, Heritage Expeditions



© M. Sylvia, Heritage Expeditions

Day 17

Monday 19 December: Bluff

This morning we arrived in Bluff Harbour. After enjoying a final breakfast together discussing our many adventures, we boarded the bus for our various drop off points, all looking forward to sharing our incredible experiences with family and friends.



© Heritage Expeditions

Copyright © 2023 Heritage Expeditions, All rights reserved.