

CHATHAM AND PITT ISLANDS

26-31 JANUARY 2026

DION HOBCROFT



A male Antipodean Albatross on a nest at Mount Hakepa was a trip highlight.

It all went to plan and our flights worked out. Firstly, from Wellington to Chatham Island and then in a small Cessna (with Alex as the pilot) to Pitt Island. Here we met Brent and he transferred us to their Flowerpot Lodge which is very comfortable indeed. Here we met Bernie, his wife, had the first of many delicious local produce meals and tried to fall asleep-a difficult task with our brains eagerly anticipating the days ahead. The most notable sighting was European Greenfinch at the Chatham airport-my only sighting during the trip.

On our first full day on Pitt Island, we explored the Caravan Bush in the morning. It gave us excellent views of Chatham Gerygone, Tomtit (endemic subspecies), Red-crowned Parakeet (endemic subspecies), Tui (endemic subspecies), New Zealand Fantail (endemic subspecies), quite a few Silvereyes and it was the only site where I flushed a couple of Australasian Swamphens on the trip. The big highlight was inspecting a couple of nest boxes that had Chatham Islands Petrel. Brent explained about the neoprene used to exclude Broad-billed Prions-a simple but effective trick that has seen the population of this rare bird increase well. Whilst having lunch we spotted a basking Chatham Island Skink basking and it posed well for photographs. The only reptile on a New Zealand subantarctic island. There were a lot of interesting endemic plants including Hebes, Spider Orchids and more. Introduced birds recorded included Eurasian Skylark, European Starling, Eurasian

Blackbird, Song Thrush, Dunnock, House Sparrow, Common Chaffinch and Redpoll. Swamp Harriers were regularly sighted.



The male Shore Plover at Glory Cove on Pitt Island.

After lunch we did the climb up Mount Hakepa, the highest point in the far east of Pitt Island. Close to the summit are some bronze statues from a German sculptor who placed hem there to receive the sun on the first day of the 2000 millenium. A huge highlight was being shown a male Antipodean Albatross incubating an egg (presumably-we did not disturb it) on a substantial nest. A rare event to be so close to such a magnificent bird. Only one or two pairs nest in the Chathams. The male is distinct from the female in having a black skull cap, whilst the female retains the chocolate breast seen in juvenile plumages of Snowy Albatross. Another amazing discovery was a Moriori stone axe just lying on the ground-well spotted by eagle-eyed Lyn.

Our second full day started with exploring Waipaua and Glory Coves. There were several loafing Brown Skuas amongst the Kelp and Silver Gulls. New Zealand Pipit (endemic subspecies) was well photographed and a few Welcome Swallows were bombing about. At Glory we were treated to a male and female Shore Plover with three chicks. They were great parents keeping a close eye on us. A real treat to see this critically endangered species not from a boat. Great news they had successfully bred here. They were mingling with several pairs of Chatham Islands Oystercatchers and we had a stroke of luck when we located a vagrant Wandering Tattler. Next, we checked out a small party of Pitt Island Shags and added White-faced Heron to the trip list with plenty of White-fronted Terns. Further offshore we scoped Buller's, Chatham and Northern Royal Albatross, Pintado Petrel,

Northern Giant-petrel and Sooty Shearwater often attending the crayboats. In the late afternoon we explored the coastline on the north west coast where you could see the spectacular layers of geologic processes from the past 50 million years. Good views were had of Weka, the buff subspecies, introduced into the Chathams from the Canterbury region of the South Island. In a strange twist of fate, it became extinct there but persists in good numbers in the Chathams where they popularly end up in the pot for dinner!



A stunning Chatham Albatross whilst we were at Pyramid Rock.

Next day was the eagerly anticipated pelagic excursion that took us from Flowerpot to Mangere Island, then to the Pyramid Rock and ultimately around Rangatira Island and back to Flowerpot. Conditions at sea were pretty lumpy despite the lightish winds. In the lee of Mangere Island with patience, we had really great views (and some photos) of the critically endangered Chatham Islands Parakeet. Try as we might we could not crack a Black Robin even though we could identify Tomtit, Silvereye and Chatham Gerygone from the boat. It seems they don't like being exposed on the edge and with Brown Skuas galore who can blame them. Pyramid Rock was awesome as the boat attracted a crowd of stunning Chatham and Buller's Albatrosses. Absolutely amazing. Northern Royal Albatross, Salvin's and White-capped Albatross, Northern Giant-Petrel, White-chinned Petrel and a lone White-faced Storm-Petrel were added to the day list. At Rangatira there were plenty of New Zealand Furseals and again we had a good look for Black Robin unsuccessfully. We could see Red-crowned Parakeets, at least four Shore Plovers and several more small passerines, so it is not inconceivable to get them from a boat, albeit very difficult. Also of note were our best views of the scarce Chatham Islands Shag.

Back at Flowerpot we enjoyed our last Bernie produced delicious meal and then were piloted across to Chatham. We said farewell to Jeanette who had joined this part of the tour on Pitt Island. Three of us (Marshall, Lyn and myself) bought supplies and spent the next two nights at Awatotara Cottage

owned by Liz and Bruce Tuanui. It is a lovely, quiet bed and breakfast quite remote but with access to nearby bushland that is home to the Chatham Islands Pigeon. We enjoyed great views of many of these.



The Chatham Islands Pigeon or Parea at Camp Taiko.

The following day was also eagerly anticipated as Liz and Bruce chaperoned us around their varied conservation covenants that they have fenced off and replanted and installed nesting boxes on. An absolutely huge effort, more than 160000 trees alone planted!! At Taiko Town on the immediate coast, we found a pair of Little Penguin chicks in one nest box, and both an adult and a chick of Sooty Shearwater in another. At Sweetwater Conservation Covenant we were given the chance to see nesting Magenta Petrels-both adult and chick and a couple more Chatham Island Petrels. This was a real highlight to see these most famous global rarities and hear from Liz and Bruce stories of David Crockett's legendary search for the Taiko.

The rest of the trip went quite well. I added European Goldfinch and Great Cormorant to my trip list. I flew out the following early afternoon. Lyn, Marshall, Bruce and Marie continued on birding and messaged me about Double-banded Plover, Bar-tailed Godwit and Pied Stilt. No doubt they added a couple more.

It was a fantastic trip which I highly recommend to anyone with a fascination for subantarctic birds and plants. Brent and Bernie did a stellar job in both the arrangements (hire cars and flights), logistics (boats and transport) and catering for us so well! Liz and Bruce were absolutely wonderful.



The legendary Taiko or Magenta Petrel shown to us by Bruce Tuanui.

BIRD LIST

*denotes introduced species to New Zealand

Bold is Chathams endemic

*Greylag Goose (*Anser anser*)

Black Swan (*Cygnus atratus*)

*Mallard (*Anas platyrhynchos*)

Pacific Black Duck (*Anas superciliosa*)

Chatham Islands Pigeon (*Hemiphaga chathamensis*)

Weka (*Gallirallus australis*)

Australasian Swamphen (*Porphyrio melanotus*)

Pied Stilt (*Himantopus leucocephalus*)

Chatham Islands Oystercatcher (*Haematopus chathamensis*)

Masked Lapwing (*Vanellus miles*)

Double-banded Plover (*Charadrius bicinctus*)

Shore Plover (*Thinornis novaeseelandiae*)

Wandering Tattler (*Tringa incana*)

Bar-tailed Godwit (*Limosa lapponica*)

Brown Skua (*Stercorarius antarcticus*)

Red-billed Gull (*Chroicocephalus novaehollandiae*)

Kelp Gull (*Larus dominicanus*)

White-fronted Tern (*Sterna striata*)

Little Penguin (*Eudyptula minor*)

Buller's Albatross (*Thalassarche bulleri*)

White-capped Albatross (*Thalassarche cauta*)

Salvin's Albatross (*Thalassarche salvini*)

Chatham Albatross (*Thalassarche eremita*)

Northern Royal Albatross (*Diomedea sanfordi*)

Antipodean Albatross (*Diomedea antipodensis*)

White-faced Storm-Petrel (*Pelagodroma marina*)

Northern Giant-Petrel (*Macronectes halli*)

Pintado Petrel (*Daption capense*)

Magenta Petrel (*Pterodroma magentae*)

Chatham Islands Petrel (*Pterodroma axillaris*)

White-chinned Petrel (*Procellaria aequinoctialis*)

Sooty Shearwater (*Ardenna grisea*)

Great Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax carbo*)

Pitt Island Shag (*Phalacrocorax featherstoni*)

Chatham Island Shag (*Leucocarbo onslowi*)

White-faced Heron (*Egretta novaehollandiae*)

Swamp Harrier (*Circus approximans*)

Red-crowned Parakeet (*Cyanoramphus novaezelandiae*)

Chatham Islands Parakeet (*Cyanoramphus forbesi*)

Tui (*Prosthemadera novaeseelandiae*)

Chatham Islands Gerygone (*Gerygone albofrontata*)

New Zealand Fantail (*Rhipidura fuliginosa*)

Tomtit (*Petroica macrocephala*)

*Eurasian Skylark (*Alauda arvensis*)

Welcome Swallow (*Hirundo neoxena*)

Silvereye (*Zosterops lateralis*)

*Eurasian Blackbird (*Turdus merula*)

*Song Thrush (*Turdus philomelos*)

*European Starling (*Sturnus vulgaris*)

*Dunnock (*Prunella modularis*)

New Zealand Pipit (*Anthus novaeseelandiae*)

*Common Chaffinch (*Fringilla coelebs*)

*European Greenfinch (*Chloris chloris*)

*Common Redpoll (*Acanthis flammea*)

*European Goldfinch (*Carduelis carduelis*)

*House Sparrow (*Passer domesticus*)



Chatham Petrel in a constructed nest burrow.

MAMMALS

New Zealand Fur seal (*Arctocephalus forsteri*)

REPTILES

Chatham Islands Skink (*Oligosoma nigroplantare*)



We were lucky to get great views of the rare Chatham Island (or Forbe's Parakeet) on Mangere Island. Photographed from the boat!