

Lynn Tough

From: Heritage Expeditions <info=heritage-expeditions.com@mail48.us4.mcsv.net> on behalf of Heritage Expeditions <info@heritage-expeditions.com>
Sent: Monday, 13 May 2013 6:48 p.m.
To: Lynn
Subject: [Web links in email disarmed] Your Expedition Log from Heritage Expeditions

Western Pacific Odyssey Voyage Log 1376

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Dear Lynn,

Thank you for choosing to travel with Heritage Expeditions on our recent voyage.

We hope you enjoy reading the Expedition Log from this voyage. If you have any problems viewing this documents please do not hesitate to contact us. We are collating the Species List and this will be available online when complete, under our [Latest News](#) section.

If you have not already shared your experience, photography skills or memories with us on our website **[MailScanner has detected a possible fraud attempt from "heritage-expeditions.us1.list-manage2.com" claiming to be www.heritage-expeditions.com](#)**, please take a few minutes to visit the 'What our guests are saying and seeing' page to submit your comments, testimonial or images from the expedition. Alternatively you can use this link <http://www.heritage-expeditions.com/testimonials> to go directly to the testimonial page. Please note we may choose to place your comments and photographs in the public viewing gallery, so whatever you submit may be viewed by any visitor to our website unless requested otherwise.

We look forward to seeing you on the *Spirit of Enderby* again soon.

With best regards,

The Heritage Expeditions Team

Western Pacific Odyssey Expedition Log 1376

25 March - 12 April 2013

MV Spirit of Enderby/Professor Khromov

Day 1: 25 March 2013

Christchurch City to Lyttelton Harbour

Passengers gathered at the Heritage Expeditions office in Christchurch city during the early afternoon to await the arrival of the coach which would transport the group to Lyttelton Harbour. The bus drove out onto the docks to the *Spirit of Enderby* where passengers boarded and were shown to their cabins. Everybody then gathered in the bar as Customs and Immigration Officers boarded the ship to carry out departure formalities.

Following this everyone gathered in the lecture room where Expedition Leader Aaron Russ and Cruise Director Sarah Russ welcomed us all on board and provided an over view of the ships workings, travel arrangements and a safety briefing. Aaron introduced the Heritage Expeditions staff. Guides/zodiac drivers were Chris Collins, Matt Bradley-Swan, Morten Joergensen and Mike Bell. Leanne Dunhill from the Heritage Expeditions office staff, Sarah Russ and little Anneliese were travelling on the expedition with us. The Ship's Doctor was Kate Goldberg, the chefs Joss Wilson and her son Rocket.

This briefing was followed by a life boat drill. Passengers were required to go to their cabins to get their life jackets and report to their appointed life boat. With life jackets fitted we all then climbed into the life boats as we would in a real emergency. Following dinner the passengers relaxed in their cabins and studied birding guides to familiarise themselves with the seabirds likely to be encountered tomorrow.

Day 2: 26 March 2013

At sea, Lyttelton Harbour running up the east coast of the South Island.

The ship departed Lyttelton Harbour at 06:00 and headed out of the heads into Pegasus Bay. When the Chief Engineer was working on the ship's engine, a small group of Hector's Dolphins was seen off the stern, including a mother with a small calf. Hector's is a rare dolphin which is endemic to New Zealand and these animals came in close providing excellent views. Once we were underway again the birding through Pegasus Bay was somewhat slower than expected. A highlight being small flocks of Hutton's Shearwater. These birds only breed in the Seaward Kaikoura Mountains so the north Canterbury/Kaikoura coast is the best place to see them. After lunch as we headed north we got closer to the Kaikoura Trench and the number, and diversity of seabirds increased.

In the late afternoon south of Kaikoura we began chumming for seabirds off the back deck, attracting in large numbers of birds; including six species of albatross – White-capped, Salvin's, Buller's, Southern Royal, Northern Royal, and Wandering (Gibson's). The back deck looked like a football stadium as people armed with cameras jostled for position. In the end to get a better view Hannah reverted to climbing the framework armed with camera to get some better shots. After dark Chris gathered everyone in the bar to start the "reading of the bird list" – this is a daily re-cap of the birds seen each day. Every passenger received a Western Pacific Odyssey Species List, in which they can record the birds seen. In order for a species to make it onto the official expedition bird list it must have been seen by three or more people.



Day 3: 27 March 2013

At sea, northern part of Cook Strait running up the west coast of the North Island

Daylight brought the birders back out on deck and we found ourselves part way through Cook Strait – the narrow passage of water separating the South and North Islands. As we headed through Cook Strait we sailed close to Stephen’s Island, famous for the lighthouse keeper’s cat who exterminated a small flightless wren endemic to the island. Today Stephen’s Island is the home to over 1 million breeding pairs of Fairy Prions and a huge population of Tuatara. The birding was somewhat slow, with Fluttering Shearwater and Diving Petrel the most prevalent; however the day was fantastic on the cetacean front. Just as we were leaving Cook Strait we came across a pod of Orca (Killer Whales). There appeared to be at least ten individuals including a large male. Shortly after this a Blue Whale was seen in the distance, and the ship passed within 500m of it allowing an excellent view. Little is known about the cetaceans in the seas around this part of New Zealand, and this sighting seemed somewhat unusual. If the sighting of one Blue Whale was unusual, then the rest of the day can only be described as exceptional. Over the course of the afternoon a further three Blue Whales were sighted, again most of them relatively close to the ship. For Liz and Kate who are keen cetacean spotters the day couldn’t have been much better.

Day 4: 28 March 2013

At sea, running up the west coast of the North Island

A pattern to ship board life seems to be starting to develop, with the keenest birders up at day break to start scouring the sea and sky for birds. Just before 07:30 the smell of bacon cooking drifts up over the top deck and slowly, one by one the birders give in to the temptation and head down for breakfast, hoping that whilst they are gone they won’t miss anything too exciting! After breakfast whilst approximately west of Auckland a Red-tailed Tropicbird was seen, which was unusual this far south and a good bird for a birder’s New Zealand list. There was a steady stream of birds all day and noticeably some of the southern species dropped out and were replaced by more northern New Zealand species – with the first Cook’s and Black Petrels being seen. For the second day running the big surprise was cetaceans – with another four Blue Whales seen. It would appear that the west coast of the North Island is a hot spot for the species at this time of year.

Day 5: 29 March 2013

At sea, north of North Island heading to Norfolk Island

06:00 33.34S 169.58E

18:00 31.43S 169.09E

We enjoyed an extra hour of sleep this morning as we adjusted our clocks back one hour to get in line with Norfolk Island time. The day dawned bright and clear with a fresh easterly but a short squall in the late afternoon had everyone dashing

inside for a time. On and off during the day there was a heavy Southeast swell, which built up a bit in the evening. The birders spent all day on deck, and were rewarded with some decent views of a number of species, but overall the number of birds seemed to be lower than expected. Highlights were White-necked Petrels, three Red-tailed Tropicbirds and one single Grey Ternlet, Herald Petrel and Providence Petrel. As the day went on people began to think ahead to tomorrow and whether the building swell would prevent us from landing on Norfolk Island. After dinner Aaron and Chris briefed us about Zodiac safety and gave an introduction to the birds of Norfolk.

Day 6: 30 March 2013

40 NM south of Norfolk Island, to Norfolk Island

06:00 29.52S 168.19E

18:00 29.04S 167.57E

Time extended again with the clocks going back a further 30 minutes to line up with Norfolk Island time. Daybreak saw the birders heading to the top deck with only 40 nautical miles of sailing until we reached Norfolk Island. As yesterday, the birds were somewhat slow, although the first Wedge-tailed Shearwater and White-bellied Storm Petrel of the trip were seen. Shortly after breakfast Philip Island came into view and then Norfolk slowly crept out of the cloud. The number of White Terns, Tropicbirds and Tasman Boobies seen also suggested that we were getting closer to land. The most common topic of discussion shifted for the first time from seabirds, to our upcoming landing and the best way to get the endemic land birds. Joss and Rocket served us up an early lunch as the Australian Customs and Immigration agents came on-board. The intensity of activity on board ship increased throughout lunch as everyone got ready to go ashore.

The first Zodiacs left the *Spirit of Enderby* at 12:30 for the harbour. Despite a good roll coming into the beach the landing was calm and nobody ended up with wet feet. We were welcomed ashore by Margaret Christian and her family who were lined up to show us around Norfolk. After getting everyone ashore, we piled into the buses and mini vans for the drive up to the National Park. First stop was Palm Glen, in the foot hills of the National Park and perfect for endemic land bird hunting. Somewhat surprisingly the Norfolk Island Parakeet was quickly seen by everyone, but the Slender-billed White-eye took a bit more work, requiring us to extend our time at Palm Glen by 30 minutes to ensure everyone got it. During this time good views were also had of the robin, whistle and greygone.

Afterwards the party split into two. The diehard birders headed off to Hundred Acres Reserve (Rocky Point) to look for breeding seabirds, and were well rewarded with great views of breeding Noddys, White Tern and Tropicbirds. On the drive back following the sighting of Californian Quail, Jeet declared that he was happy and had seen the "bird of the trip". The rest of the group went for a general tour around Norfolk, which included a lap around the island, a quick run through the small shopping district and more time to explore the convict ruins around Kingston.

We met back at the pier at 17:30, loaded into the Zodiacs and boarded the *Spirit of Enderby* then headed to the bar for the daily recap and bird list. A great day was had by all, and everyone agreed it was nice to be off the ship and have a chance to stretch our legs. Thanks to Margaret and her team for such a great day, especially with such friendly and accommodating guides who were willing to impart so much information. The crew lifted the anchor and we started heading towards New Caledonia.



Day 7: 31 March 2013 (Easter Sunday)

At sea, north of Norfolk Island heading towards New Caledonia

06:00 27.06S 167.24E

18:00 25.16S 166.57E

The earlier rising birders were well rewarded this morning when Graham spotted a Collared Petrel, it passed right by the ship allowing good views, but there was no one with a camera about to get a shot! The Easter bunny had arrived over night, with everyone getting a small stash of chocolate eggs with their breakfast. After breakfast a fish oil slick was laid out, and then we spent the next two hours doing pass bys around this. The weather conditions were perfect for oiling, with the slick holding together well and not spreading out too far. This clearly helped and attracted good numbers of Tahiti and Black-winged Petrel which remained within or near the slick. This provided great views of the Tahiti Petrels in particular which came in close allowing us with excellent photo opportunities.

Continuing with the Easter theme, Joss and Rocket served up freshly baked hot cross buns for lunch. The most noteworthy sightings during a fairly slow afternoon were numerous small flocks of Short-tailed Shearwaters passing by the ship on their migration north. Following dinner Chris gave an over view of the birds of New Caledonia and broke the news that Tuesday's start time will be 3am!

Day 8: 1 April 2013

At sea, approximately 40 nautical miles south of New Caledonia heading to Noumea

06:00 23.15S 166.49E

18:00 22.47E 166.33E

We had made good progress over night and at daybreak were approximately 40 nautical miles south of New Caledonia in the area we wanted to search for the 'New Caledonian Storm Petrel'. Shortly after breakfast we laid out a slick and spent the next few hours circling this looking for birds. The slick attracted good numbers of Tahiti Petrel and Wedge-tailed Shearwater, but no storm petrels of any species were seen. During lunch the ship sailed further north, to a spot where Chris and Kurt had only a few weeks ago seen several 'New Caledonian Storm Petrels' on a trip aimed at attempting to catch this "unknown" species. On arrival at this location we laid out a second oil slick, and dropped one of the buckets of frozen chum previously prepared by Chris and Mike and now dubbed the 'chumsicle'. This attracted great numbers of Wedge-tailed Shearwaters and Tahiti Petrel which were actively feeding on the fish. In addition a few Gould's Petrels and Wilson's Storm Petrels were also seen. Chris spotted what he thought was a 'New Caledonian Storm Petrel' and about four others had a quick view of a bird which appeared to have a white belly. Unfortunately it did not hang around and moved off the slick and disappeared. We remained with the slick for a further two hours, but the bird was not seen again. Joss and

Rocket served up another fine dinner and most turned in early in preparation for the very early start the following morning.

Day 9: 2 April 2013

New Caledonia, birding at Riviere Bleue.

06:00 Tied up at Noumea
18:00 22.22S 166.15E

The ship picked up the Pilot at 01:00 and headed inside the reef to the harbour at Noumea. So by the time Aaron made the 03:15 wakeup call we were alongside the quay and the ship's crew was busy with the Customs and Immigration agents. Joss and Rocket had got up extra early and put on a full breakfast which enabled everyone to be fed and watered by 04:30 and ready to depart. The bus kept us waiting for a time, running about half an hour late. We headed out of Noumea and into the centre of the island, towards Riviere Bleue National Park for a day's birding.

On arrival at the park we had a quick comfort stop, and despite Aaron's instruction that this wasn't a birding stop, Barred Honeyeater and Red-faced Parrot Finch were spotted. Somehow we managed to drag everyone away and herd them back onto the bus to continue into the park. The driver had a few issues with the greasy road so we cautiously made our way. We arrived at Le Pont Perignon where we left the bus and were shuttled the eight kilometres to the edge of the rain forest by minivan to start birding. The first species on everybody's wish list was the Kagu and the first bird was soon found. It responded well to the tape playback allowing great views and excellent photo opportunities. A little later we saw five Kagu in a group and throughout the day over 15 individual birds were seen. The efforts of conservationists in New Caledonia to save this remarkable bird should be applauded.

After finding the Kagu we walked through the forest along the road to Grande Kauri searching for other endemic birds. The road makes its way through second growth forest and at places there are clear views out over the river. The weather was kind to us, being not too hot with only two short heavy downpours which caused cameras to be hurriedly packed away. We saw a number of endemics as we spread out along the road. Mike caused a stampede at one stage, pointing out a green bird which ended up being a leaf! However, the prize must go to his wife Liz, who despite claiming not to be a birder was the only person to see both the New Caledonian Parakeet and the Horned Parakeet. A total of 14 endemic birds were seen amongst our group, with highlights including the Cloven-feathered Dove, New Caledonian Friarbird and Myzomela. Geoff also saw the New Caledonian Crow using a twig as a tool, which is what has made these birds famous.

The drive back to the ship was much quieter than our outbound journey, with the early morning start taking its toll and many people dozing off. Those that managed to stay awake added a few more birds to the list on the way back. On arrival back at the quay Chris called in Dark-brown Honeyeater in the few scattered trees about the wharf. Departure from New Caledonia meant saying good bye to our new friends Noel and Heather who got off the ship here due to Heathers hand injury. The ship was pulled off the wharf by a tug, and we headed out of the harbour towards the reef entrance. As we passed numerous small islands a good watch was kept for terns, with Bridled, Fairy and Crested Terns seen. Joss and Rocket had prepared some wonderful food platters and eating these outside on the monkey deck as we sailed away from New Caledonia after a great day birding made us appreciate that this is the way to live!



Day 10: 3 April 2013

At sea, running up the coast of New Caledonia

06:00 21.20S 164.35E

18:00 20.02S 163.22E

First light is now around 0:600 and the keen birders are up on deck by this time, only racing inside for a quick breakfast before returning to deck to continue the watch. The birding in the morning was quite slow, although there were several large flocks of Wedge-tailed Shearwaters feeding and Black Noddy which required our attention. Throughout the day all three species of booby were seen – Masked, Brown and Red-footed, with the latter putting up a great display as they attempted to catch flying fish put up by the ship. After lunch we laid an oil slick in the water and made several passes to check for birds. This soon attracted several Tahiti Petrels, Wedge-tailed Shearwaters and Wilson’s Storm Petrels. Later an interesting dark storm petrel with a white rump came in to the slick briefly on two occasions and was identified as a Band-rumped Storm Petrel. Joss and Rocket produced a great dinner, followed by a stunning pudding which some of the group described as “death by chocolate”.

Day 11: 4 April 2013

At sea, north of New Caledonia heading towards Rennell Island.

06:00 18.07S 162.33E

18:00 16.33S 162.05E

The early rising birders were well rewarded this morning with a Polynesian Storm Petrel being seen just before 07:00. Chris spotted the bird ahead of the ship and it came down along the port side to about mid ship when it turned and followed alongside us for a time before heading off towards the northeast. Although only seen briefly it came in fairly close to the boat and allowed good views to be had, especially showing the distinctive flight pattern – very little wing flapping and lots of gliding. Needless to say breakfast was a very short affair for most, as most people desperately searched for another one. Luck was on our side and throughout the day a further three Polynesian Storm Petrels were seen, including one bird during lunch time which caused a mad dash for the stairs! First thing in the morning Morten had found a flying fish which had landed and expired on the 400 deck. The fish was in near perfect condition and enabled a close inspection of the creature of which we have seen plenty, but obviously rarely get a chance to see in the hand. It was later thrown overboard and was taken by a Red-footed Booby.

As the temperate started to climb in the afternoon, the birding dropped off and a Hawksbill Turtle in close to the boat caused a welcome distraction. To battle the heat our Russian crew turned on the back deck hose to cool off and filled a rubbish skip with water to act as a plunge pool. Lucky wee Anneliese got to enjoy her paddling pool which was also set up on the back deck. The birding in the late afternoon picked up a little, with five Band-rumped Storm petrels, two Tropical

Shearwaters and single Magnificent and Providence Petrels being seen. After dinner Mike gave a presentation on the efforts of the Taiko Trust, a community conservation group in the Chatham Islands striving to save the Magenta Petrel and other endemic bird life.

Day 12: 5 April 2013

At sea, south of and heading towards Rennell Island.

06:00 14.41S 161.03E

18:00 12.15S 160.02E

In short, today was a very hot day with the birding very slow. The keen birders stuck at it all day and at the end of the day had little to crow about. It was noticed that every now and then someone disappeared from the crowd as they snuck off for a short nap! Throughout the day conversation shifted towards the upcoming landing on Rennell Island and the list of birds which might be seen. At sunset Leanne had made a tasty 'sun down spritzer' which was enjoyed on the bow and monkey deck. A very refreshing end to a long hot day in the sun! During the afternoon, the TV monitors were flicking through the photos which had been entered into the photo competition. After the reading of the bird list, Sarah announced the winners. The 'At Sea' winner was (unsurprisingly) Bruce's image of a White-capped Albatross seen on the first day at sea whilst chumming on the Kaikoura Trench. Geoff won the 'At Land' section with a beautiful photo of two Kagu taken at Riverre Bleue. Laurens won the 'People' section with a shot of one of the Russian crew being hosed down with the deck hose to cool off. Thanks to all those who entered their images. It was great to remember the sights we have seen and the efforts of those who have been working hard with their photography. After dinner Chris presented an overview of the birds of Rennell Island, and then everyone turned in early in preparation for an early start in the morning.

Day 13: 6 April 2013

Ashore at Rennell Island, Lavangu Village

06:00 11.42S 160.16E

18:00 11.56S 160.33E

During the early hours of the morning the *Spirit of Enderby* arrived offshore of Rennell Island, the southern most of the Solomon Islands. The waters around the island are too deep to anchor, so the Captain needed to maintain a position offshore. The morning call was made at 05:30 and breakfast was served shortly after this. At first light, Aaron and Mike went ashore to pick up the Solomon Islands Custom and Immigration Officials and brought them on board. Once formalities had been completed by the officials, we started taking passengers ashore. As it was high tide the Zodiacs had no trouble negotiating the narrow reef entrance and were soon inside the calm turquoise lagoon heading for the sandy beach. We were welcomed ashore at Lavange Village by Johnson and his friendly band of helpers. After a quick briefing by Chris we headed inland to start birding.

The road from the beach climbs up a steep slope and then meanders through the main village for some time. The village consists of about 40 dwellings and there were a lot of new buildings under construction. The birders continued along this road which initially passes through land cleared by villagers for growing crops and regenerating scrub/forest. As the road gets further inland it enters mature primary rainforest. After about two kilometres it joins a wider forestry road, along which came barreling the odd lorry. At places we headed off this road along small trails which the villagers use to harvest timber for their own use. These trails gave us a much better sense of the nature and structure of the rainforest and in particular the rough jagged limestone nature of the forest floor. The birding was great, with good sightings of all the targeted endemic birds. Highlights included excellent views of the Silver-capped Fruit Dove, Rennell Shrikebill, Fantail and White-eye. The Bare-eyed White-eye was most interesting as it doesn't have a white eye at all.

Those not so obsessed with birds spent their time exploring the village, wandering along paths and discovering how locals live in such an isolated location. Some of the group were invited into the homes, visited the local school and took a closer look at some of the fruit and vegetable plantations. The young local boys provided each of us with a refreshing fresh coconut to drink on the return from our walk. Jemi delighted the kids by taking photos with her digital camera and then instantly printing off photos for them. As the day warmed up many headed to the beach to swim and snorkel. The coral and fish life in the lagoon, especially in the deeper water by the lagoon entrance was quite spectacular. Peter and Liz found themselves an idyllic spot on the water's edge at the far end of the beach to relax in peace.

At 14:30 the last Zodiac left the beach and we waved the Lavange Villagers farewell. Once on board we welcomed the news that Joss and Rocket had extended lunch time so we could all get a bite to eat. After lunch many people retired to their cabins for a well earned rest, to download photos or just to cool off in the air conditioning. Later in the afternoon some heavy rain came through which had the bow camera crew trio of Geoff, Kurt and John racing inside and temporarily abandoning their photography of flying fish. Before dinner Chris gave a run down on the birds of Makira, where we will be birding and visiting a local village tomorrow. This was followed by the usual reading of the bird list and dinner. We all

agreed that today's visit to Rennell was fantastic. The island had a wonderful feel to it, the locals were friendly and the birds great. Most turned in immediately after dinner looking forward to an early start again tomorrow as we island hop through the Solomon Islands.



Day 14: 7 April 2013

Ashore at Makira Island, and Anuta Village

06:00 10.21S 161.22E

18:00 09.59S 161.05E

As dawn broke the Captain was bringing us into Kirakira Harbour where the ship anchored. Shortly afterwards the Zodiacs were lowered and the first groups were transferred to Makira Island for a morning's birding. Once all were ashore we headed up the steep track into the forest in search of birds. The logging operations have been abandoned during the past year and the roadway has become somewhat overgrown. However the damage caused by their presence was visible everywhere, with discarded logs left lying about and the forest highly degraded in places. We followed the road as it climbed into the interior of the island, working our way through areas of more intact forest and ridges with wide views across the forest where we could scan for birds. The forest was poorer than yesterday at Rennell Island and the birds somewhat harder to get. Overall the birding that day was a little frustrating and pretty tough going, with many people dipping out on the key endemics. Highlights included Brahminy Kite, Pied Goshawk, Red-knobbed Imperial Pigeon, Yellow-bibbed Lory, Makira Cicadabird, and Sooty Myzomela.



Our next stop was at Anuta Village where it appeared that every villager had turned out to welcome us ashore. The local women and children had made floral leis to present to each visitor and these were presented to each of us by young girls as we came ashore. The fresh coconuts they gave us to drink were a welcome refresher after our hike through the forests. The children in particular were especially welcoming, very inquisitive and interested in our presence. Jemi was again a big hit with her camera which printed off digital images. The delight in the eyes of the children receiving a picture of themselves and their friends will remain a lasting memory. Baby Anneliese was just about kidnapped as soon as Sarah carried her ashore. The local mothers and grandmothers snatched her up in their arms as soon as she arrived and then passed her around for everyone to have a hold. The kids were delighted with her and followed her every move, including a swim later during the visit when Sarah and Anneliese were surrounded by children in the water.

The chief of the village welcomed us and explained how the village was very grateful for our visit. He told us that the outer villages of the Solomon's receive little assistance from central government in Honiara and that this message needs to be taken back to the countries we come from. Following the welcome we were left to explore the village, with many locals showing small groups of us around. Life is pretty basic here; cooking over open fires and in stone ovens; washing and bathing in the stream; and drinking water being rainwater collected in tanks from the roof. The locals were genuinely grateful for our visit and as interested in our stories as we were with theirs.

On the way back to the ship in the Zodiacs we saw a pair of Beach Kingfishers and got some great views. Once back on-board the *Spirit of Enderby* there was a chance for people to go for a swim off the ship and later we set sail for Honiara. The sea was glassy calm and it didn't take Mike long to find a small pod of Pigmy Sperm Whales, however the hopes of more such sightings during the afternoon disappeared as rain set in and the sea chopped up.



Day 15: 8 April 2013

Ashore at Guadalcanal, Honiara and Mount Austin

Aaron's morning call at 03:30 saw us anchored off Honiara, the capital of the Solomon Islands. Joss and Rocket had again got up earlier to provide us with a hearty breakfast before our day ashore. The first Zodiacs headed to the bustling wharves at 04:30, dodging the inter-island freighters and dugout canoes in the dark on the way in. Our local agent Wilson and his drivers were waiting for us and we transferred to the shuttle bus and four wheel drive vehicles for the trip up to Mount Austin. The morning had gone smoothly, so we arrived up the mountain before day break. This gave us the chance to try for the owl, and following tape playback it was heard in the distance but not seen. We arrived at the top of Mount Austin just as day was breaking.

After a quick briefing by Chris, we headed off into the forest. From the clearing at the top of the hill, the path dropped off steeply down into a river valley, followed shortly by a wide vista which provided good views over a large area of forest. Some time was spent here targeting birds and was the only place that the Buff-headed Coucal was seen (several others were heard, but not seen). As the track continued to drop into the valley it passed through a variety of habitats from areas of thick forest to regenerating forest and then small grassy clearings. The birding was much more productive than yesterday, with the tally of targeted birds slowly increasing as the group moved further along the trail. There seemed to be a lack of smaller forest birds however, or was it just that these were harder to see? The Ultramarine Kingfisher was spotted and the bird stayed perched for some time allowing excellent views and photo opportunities. Most ended up with a pretty healthy bird list for the area, with highlights including great views of Blyth's Hornbill, Solomon's Sea Eagle, Solomon's Cuckooshrike and Black-headed Myzomela.

Meanwhile, those who didn't want an early morning start headed into Honiara at 08:00 and spent the day exploring the city. Joss and Rocket visited the local market and bought a selection of local fruits which were provided at lunch. The refreshing taste of local tropic fruits was greatly enjoyed by the group. The overall impression of Honiara is that the locals are friendly, but that there is much poverty and hardship, resulting in the town centre being somewhat run down.

The birders arrived back at the wharf at 11:30 and headed back out to the ship for lunch. We bid farewell to Leanne, Matt and Mike as they left the ship for flights out to Brisbane and home. In the early afternoon we set sail once again and the wildlife highlight was a pod of False Killer Whales. That evening we enjoyed a stunning sunset as we continued our way northwards.

Day 16: 9 April 2013

Ashore at Kolombangara Island, Kukudu

The *Spirit of Enderby* had made good time overnight and dawn saw us heading into Kolombangara Island a few hours ahead of schedule. This was welcome news as it provided more time for birding. The Zodiacs started shuttling people ashore straight after breakfast at 07:30. The trip to shore passed around a coral reef and landed people at the mouth of a

small river in the village of Kukudu. A huge tree beside the landing place provided a welcome source of shade. Wasting no time as usual, Chris provided a quick briefing and then we headed out through the school grounds in search of the Roviana Rail. Chris's playback did not work in attracting any rails, but he did manage to attract the attention of a cat which started stalking towards the call!

As the tracks on this island are narrow single file tracks, it was best to split the group into two to head off birding, each doing the same circuit but in a different direction. Initially the track followed the coastline through a grove of coconut palms where Graham, Allan and Janet were lucky enough to see two Melanesian Scrubfowl. We meandered through a village which stretched along the river bank to the forest edge. The track then dived into the forest, initially low regenerating forest, but further back it became more mature but was clearly not completely unmodified. Our local guides led us around a number of trails as we searched for birds, finally coming back out onto the Kukudu school sports field.

The days birding was somewhat tough going, birds could be heard calling but would not come out to be seen even when we used tape playback, so the extra time ashore was valuable. However, the list of targeted birds seen gradually crept up, and by the end of play a good selection of birds had been recorded. The first group managed to get the Roviana Rail relatively easily, with the second group waiting at the same spot for over an hour. By this time a small group had broken off to go back into the forest to continue searching for other birds, only to end up missing the rail. Back at the landing site the local artists had gathered and were displaying a range of stone and wood carvings which were for sale. Many of the carvings were true works of art and are a credit to the local villagers. The tide had dropped during our time ashore, so the Zodiacs had to weave their way out of the small river channel to get everyone back on board for a late lunch.

After lunch we drifted along the coast and a group of kids in six dugout canoes paddled out to the ship. Their friendly smiles and waves were a delight to see. A large burst of thunder had them quickly turning for shore however as they obviously had a healthy respect for the weather! Shortly afterwards we boarded our own 'canoes' (a.k.a. Zodiacs!) and headed towards land again. Chris led the small group who dipped out on the rail back for another crack, while the remaining three Zodiacs went for a cruise along the mangrove forests. This was a fascinating trip and a magical way to experience the island. We passed several women fishing from dugout canoes, saw amazing orchids hanging from branches and had good views of the birds. Aaron led us along a narrow waterway deep into the mangroves where we often had to dodge fallen trees. Heinz who was perched on the front of one of the Zodiacs had to lie flat as the craft made its way under a low fallen tree to avoid being knocked off! When we arrived back at the ship at sunset, everyone agreed that our last day in the Solomon Islands was great, with the Zodiac cruise a great way to finish off. At the reading of the bird list, Erling again pointed out which of the birds we had seen represented an endemic subspecies.



Day 17: 10 April 2013

At sea, passing Bougainville and New Britain.

The morning found us over the deep water trench between Bougainville and New Britain, Papua New Guinea, and

throughout the day we moved closer inshore, travelling along the 1000 metre contour. This is an area which in the past has produced good birding and cetaceans so most were up early and on deck scanning the seas. The day proved to be a little disappointing with only a small number of birds, whales and dolphins seen. Whilst in the Solomons we had learned that the water temperature was 3-5 degrees warmer than usual and it would seem likely that this has influenced the marine life. The main highlight of the day was the sighting of a few Heinroth's Shearwater, a species all of the birders were keen to see.

Day 18: 11 April 2013

At sea, between New Britain and New Ireland

Dawn break on our final day at sea saw all the usual suspects on deck, keen to make the most of their last opportunity for more ticks. This time they were quickly rewarded with an early sighting of Beck's Petrel. Many people decided to forgo breakfast in the hope of getting another sighting, and more than once there was a mass departure from the restaurant when a Beck's Petrel sighting was radioed in. As the day progressed it proved to be a very fruitful one, with the birding and cetacean watching much better than yesterday. Regular sightings of target birds, whales and dolphins kept the team interested and keen. Highlights for the day included multiple sightings of Beck's Petrel and Heinroth's Shearwater, and sightings of False Killer Whales and Spinner Dolphins.

The final evening in the bar saw all crowded in for the last reading of the bird list by Chris. The final tally of species was 206, and Mike won the BirdLife 'Guess the number of birds seen' competition. Sarah then announced the winners of the second photo challenge. They were: Bruce with his shot of a sleeping child in a village; Hannah with an underwater shot of a floating coconut; John with his Beach Kingfisher shot; and Laurens with his Ultramarine Kingfisher shot. Afterwards Aaron put on a slideshow reviewing the expedition. It was great to see all the photos and re-live the trip from the beginning. It has been an amazing trip with some stunning birds and fascinating locations. After the final dinner prepared by Joss and Rocket, Bruce gave a short slide show of his photos from the trip. He had some truly stunning shots and was a nice way to close out the night.

Day 19: 12 April 2013

New Ireland, ashore at Kavieng

At dawn we anchored in the Port of Kavieng. The Papua New Guinea Immigration and Customs officials took their time coming onboard and then took even longer processing the paper work before we could go ashore. The call this 'island time'! Everyone was busy packing and organising themselves, and finally we were given the all clear to head ashore. Baggage was sent ashore first and the passengers followed. Once ashore we were transferred to the Kavieng Hotel to drop off gear before our day trip.

We boarded a couple of buses and mini vans for the hour and a half drive south of Kavieng to a small village. On the way out everybody was moved by how much of the vegetation had been cleared to make way for palm oil plantations. Large swathes of the island were covered in the palms and it was a stark contrast to the lush forests we have been visiting. Many island economies inevitably rely on this type of agriculture but it seems a shame to lose so much native vegetation. The traditional welcome was loud and colourful, with some amazing masks used. Afterwards a lunch of barbecued chicken and fish with locally grown vegetables and fruit was served. On the way back to the hotel we headed inland to an area of forest where we spent an hour looking for birds. A number of endemics were spotted.

That evening we all gathered in the hotel restaurant for a seafood buffet dinner. We spent a pleasant evening chatting, swapping emails and talking over the expedition highlights and birds seen.

We were all agreed, the Western Pacific Odyssey 2013 was a great trip.



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Heritage Expeditions
Antarctic House
53b Montreal Street
Christchurch, Canterbury 8023
New Zealand

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