

**Trip Log**  
**Voyage # 2667**  
**Western Pacific Odyssey**  
**30<sup>th</sup> March - 29<sup>th</sup> April 2010**



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**March 30, 2010**

**Tauranga and out to sea**

By mid afternoon, all 31 intrepid passengers of the WPO had gathered on our vessel, the Spirit of Enderby. Excitement was high as we prepared for departure of this epic voyage. First there were some practical considerations and we had to clear customs before heading out on deck as we let loose the lines and sailed out under Mount Manganui. Variable and South Island Pied Oystercatchers were both seen, two species that are new for the WPO! We also saw numerous other coastal species – Caspian and White-fronted Tern, Kelp and Red-bill Gull and Pied and Little Pied Shag. Once the pilot jumped off we headed out into the open ocean in a light swell and recorded our first seabirds of the trip – Fluttering Shearwater. There were good numbers of these small shearwaters, along with several Buller's Shearwater and a few Australasian Gannet.

With sunset approaching, it was time to head indoors for an introduction briefing to the ship and staff, along with the safety briefing. Then it was time for a short birdlist and our first excellent dinner served up by Brad and Nicki. We set a course for the Hauraki Gulf and headed there in a light swell.

**March 31, 2010**

**Hauraki Gulf**

First light did not appear until 0730 at which time almost all of us had assembled in the bridge or on the monkey deck. We were just off the Mokohinau Rocks and as light appeared we began to see our first seabirds – Black Petrels and Buller's Shearwaters. As we approached the rocks we saw many Australasian Gannets which nest there, along with good numbers of Red-billed Gulls and a few Pied Shags. Eventually a couple of Grey Ternlets were seen flying low over the surf and after Captain Dmitry moved the ship in closer everyone was able to see these small terns here at their only New Zealand location.

Over breakfast we headed off into deeper waters and began an oil drip in the hopes of attracting the recently rediscovered New Zealand Storm-petrel, one of the key seabirds of the trip. New seabirds began appearing – Sooty and Flesh-footed Shearwater, Grey-faced and Cook's Petrel, Common Diving-petrel and surprisingly good numbers of albatross – numerous Gibson's, and small number of Buller's, White-capped, and Campbell. Both Northern and Southern Giant Petrel were recorded and both are new species for the WPO. Certainly the highest numbers of these albatross and giant petrels we have ever encountered on this trip.

But the prize had not yet been seen, so we opted to lay an oil slick on the water. Within a minute a storm-petrel arrived to check it out, along with several other seabirds. So the ship cruised past the oil slick and indeed there was a New Zealand Storm-petrel cruising over the oil slick, giving quite good views. The bird disappeared and a second pass of the ship along the oil slick failed to turn up any at all. So we tried a third time past the oil slick and this time there were at least 3 New Zealand Storm-petrels which showed extremely well for a few minutes under the bow. They were well photographed and also seen well by everybody. Along with them were 2 Wilson's Storm-petrel, a White-faced Storm-petrel, Fairy Prions and a Black-winged Petrel, all of this making for a very exciting few minutes!

With everyone well satisfied, we set a course for Norfolk Island some 500 miles distant and carried on through the Hauraki Gulf. Through the late morning and the rest of the afternoon, we kept our vigil on deck and were rewarded with some great seabirding in these highly productive waters. A surprise throughout the day was the constant presence of albatross of 5 or 6 species which included yet another WPO-first Northern Royal Albatross and a probably Antipodean Albatross following the ship all afternoon. Black Petrels and Buller's Shearwater were particularly numerous and we passed several rafts of the latter species sitting on the water. Late afternoon a White-necked Petrel was spotted and was much appreciated by those who got on it. The wind increased over the course of the afternoon and along with it a gentle swell built as we headed indoors to do the birdlist and have dinner. Most people were quite tired from their long day of seabirding and headed in for an early night as the swell continued to build.

**April 1, 2010**

**At sea en route Norfolk Island**

By sunrise, the New Zealand coastline had long since disappeared from view and we were out on the open ocean. A light swell continued and people gradually developed their sea legs. Bird activity was much slower than the previous day as we sailed north through the deep water between New Zealand and Norfolk Island. But this open, deep ocean is the realm of the *Pterodroma* petrels and we would have frequent sightings throughout the morning. Grey-faced Petrel was by a long shot the most common species of the day, with Black-winged Petrel being the second most common in abundance. Very small numbers of White-necked Petrels were also seen and mid morning we picked up our first Kermadec Petrel of the trip. Grey Ternlets were seen twice during the morning, giving much better views than we had achieved at the Mokohinau. The highlight of the morning for many was a gorgeous Red-tailed Tropicbird bird that flew right under the bow and alighted on the water before carrying on again. More surprising were the Gibson's and Campbell Albatrosses that continued to follow the ship.

After lunch and a few small squalls bird activity once again picked up. More *Pterodromas* were seen including two more Kermadecs and the odd albatross continued to appear, at one time we had 4 Gibson's in sight simultaneously. By late afternoon, with attention fading, we were all woken up by a group of cetaceans closing in on us. This proved to be a pod of 14 False Killer Whales which put on a fabulous performance, including animals breaching clear out of the water. They were accompanied by a horde of Grey-faced Petrels. Soon after this fantastic performance which must have been the highlight of the day, we turned in for a beer, the birdlist and dinner.

Following dinner it was Chris giving us a briefing of what birds we might encounter at Norfolk Island and then off to bed.

**April 2, 2010**

### **At sea en route Norfolk Island**

The wind refused to calm down and in fact increased, the swell increasing along with it. Seabirding remained slow but steady and there was a marked increase in sightings of the gorgeous White-necked Petrel. We also recorded numerous Black-winged and Grey-faced Petrel and somewhat surprisingly several Cook's Petrel. Our first White Terns of the trip also showed up this morning.

Things remained pretty quiet during the start of the afternoon, but as we neared the shallower water surrounding Norfolk Island, things really picked up a lot. Masked Booby (or Tasman Booby) came in to investigate the ship, feeding flocks contained our first Black Noddies, Wedge-tailed Shearwaters and a Sooty Tern. Black-winged, Grey-faced, and White-necked Petrel were all seen in good numbers and late afternoon our first striking Tahiti Petrel was observed, we saw several before dusk. An unidentified storm-petrel was briefly observed and a small group of Short-finned Pilot Whales cruised past the ship. Just before dusk, the Little Shearwaters that we had been searching for made their appearance, hunting low over the water, giving great views. All in all a very exciting few hours. Philip Island as well as the main Norfolk Island loomed into sight as the sun set and we headed in for a drink, bird list and a fine dinner. We spent the night off the western side of Norfolk Island which gave us some respite from the relatively large swell that was running from the southeast. The wind died down giving cause for hope that we might make a landing tomorrow.

**April 3, 2010**

### **Norfolk Island**

Conditions improved overnight and we came to anchor off Sydney Cove where the main wharf is. There was still a fairly large swell running, but Rodney was keen to give it a go, so we headed in to pick up our customs officers and once the ship was cleared ferried everyone to shore. It was a lumpy ride in over 2-meter swells, but once inside the breakwater it was a straightforward landing onto the wharf.

Once all ashore, we boarded our coaches and headed straight for the botanical gardens. The botanical gardens contain specimens of most of the islands rare endemic plants, such as Norfolk Island Pine (*Araucaria*) and Tree Fern (*Cyathea brownii*). Of more interest to us is that all three endemic birds occur here. Unfortunately, the island is undergoing the worst drought in living memory and the dry conditions made birding more difficult than usual, however we all pretty quickly locked on to the Norfolk Gerygone and Slender-billed White-eye. More elusive were the Norfolk Parakeets that chattered away from the tops of the *Araucarias* but by the end of the morning, most people had locked on to this species. Other birds seen by most were Golden Whistler and Grey Fantail. Emerald Dove and the beautiful Scarlet Robin were very shy in the dry conditions and only seen by a few people.

It was time to leave the botanic gardens so we made an unplanned detour up into the National Park for a stakeout of a Scarlet Robin family – the female and juveniles cooperated immediately although the male was not to be seen. After carrying on to the top of the island for a superb overview of the island, we headed for the coast and enjoyed some spectacular lookout points, recording such species as Nankeen Kestrel, White-faced Heron, Swamp Harrier, and the introduced Crimson Rosella.

Lunch was at the home of our guide, Margaret Christian. It was a fine spread in spectacular settings, replete with juvenile Tasman Boobies and a Great Frigatebird! Many of us got signed copies of her book on the island's birds and all too soon it was time to head off. We were given three options; a few people opted for a swim in the inviting waters of Anson Bay, three people headed up into the native forest for an (unsuccessful) longshot at the probably extinct White-breasted White-eye. The vast majority headed for the seabird colonies where Black Noddies and White Terns were encountered in large numbers in the pines -- a most unusual sight!! Arriving at the beach we were greeted by many Red-tailed Tropicbirds wheeling around the cliffs and even a chick hiding under the bushes. A few Wandering Tattlers and Ruddy Turnstones were on the rocky shoreline below us.

All too soon it was time to leave this subtropical paradise and return to the ship. We made a rather adventurous departure from the ship by leaving via the heavy surf landing at Anson Bay. We all got wet, but the water was warm!

The day was not done yet and we encountered good numbers of seabirds as we headed on our way to our next destination of New Caledonia. Black Noddy and Wedge-tailed Shearwater were seen in good numbers, along with

lesser numbers of Grey-faced, Black-winged and White-necked Petrel, Masked Booby and Red-tailed Tropicbird. A couple more Little Shearwaters were seen well along with a perplexing dark-faced small shearwater that was seen and photographed very well. The highlight was a White-bellied Storm-petrel that Chris' sharp eyes picked up and was seen well by almost everyone.

It had been a fantastic and long day by the time we all headed in for a drink, bird list, and dinner.

**April 4, 2010**

### **The Coral Sea en route New Caledonia**

A gentle swell continued, but the wind had dropped right out. It was a sunny, warm day and the birding was very slow but steady today, classic tropical seabirding. Before breakfast excellent views were had of a Cuvier's Beaked Whale that swam right under the bow. Following a quick breakfast, we laid a large oil slick and passed by several times. The slick did not attract a huge number of birds, but there were some interesting species. A distant storm-petrel could not be identified, but we had excellent looks at a couple Gould's Petrels, along with a White-necked and several Black-winged and Tahiti. As we sailed north through wonderful conditions, we observed occasional Red-tailed Tropicbird, Masked Booby, White Tern and Wedge-tailed Shearwater. Black-winged and Tahiti Petrels were the most common sightings and there was another Gould's, but the highlight of the day was a very obliging dark-morph Collared Petrel that flew right under the bows, giving excellent views and one of the first ever sightings in Australian waters!

After lunch things were rather more quiet with the tropical heat starting to bear down on us. The afternoon was enlivened by three different White-tailed Tropicbirds that showed very well. Distant blows were seen and were quickly identified as Sperm Whales based on their distinctive diagonal shape. At least three animals were logging near to the surface and were watched for some time as we approached ever closer; eventually we got quite decent views of their backs and then their flukes when they dove. Numerous Gould's Petrels were also encountered over the course of the late afternoon. A further three animals were seen towards sunset giving even better views. So, with another fine day done, we turned in for our birdlist, dinner and bed.

**April 5, 2010**

### **At sea south of Noumea and Mt Koghi**

Most of us were out shortly after sunrise as we made our way towards the pilotage outside of the Barrier Reef of New Caledonia. Gould's Petrels and Wedge-tailed Shearwater were much in evidence throughout the morning and there was a small passage of Short-tailed Shearwater. Not long after sunrise a large, storm-petrel with a whitish belly was picked up. The bird disappeared, but it seemed that this was the mysterious storm-petrel that was seen in 2008 near this spot. We quickly laid an oil slick on the water and made a couple passes. The slick brought in a few birds, mainly Tahiti and Gould's Petrel, but no stormies were attracted.

Suddenly a pod of beaked whales, at least 8 in all were seen logging at the surface. With their white melon-shaped heads, tight group formation and bushy blows these were almost certainly the poorly known and rarely seen Longman's Beaked Whale. Minutes later, the storm-petrel appeared and we obtained close views of it over the next 5 minutes. It was joined by a Wilson's Storm-petrel which gave direct size comparison, this mystery storm-petrel being obviously larger. Excellent photographs of this bird were obtained. Looking essentially like a large New Zealand Storm-petrel, this bird just does not match with any species of storm-petrel and can only leave us scratching our heads in puzzlement.

And it wasn't even breakfast! What a start to the day!

As we made our approach towards the pilotage, we continued to encounter many Gould's Petrels. A "White-necked Petrel" was also seen, though from which breeding island we can only guess. A *Kogia* sperm whale logged on the surface allowing excellent views and good photographs; on the basis of its prominent dorsal fin, this appears to be a Dwarf Sperm Whale. Near the pilot station, more small whales were seen and these were believed to be Cuvier's Beaked Whale.

At noon our pilot came aboard and we proceeded through a channel in the stunning barrier reef and towards the port of Noumea. New birds were found – Great Crested Tern, a Brahminy Kite sitting on a channel marker and a Fairy Tern that flew right in front of the ship. We continued right in to our moorage in downtown Noumea and were greeted by Silver Gulls and Dark-brown Honeyeater which Chris managed to tape right onto the ship!

Customs formalities took more than an hour but finally we were able to leave the ship. As we were had most of unplanned afternoon in hand, Chris and Rodney did an excellent job of scrambling to order a fleet of 8 taxis to take us up Mount Koghi. By a small miracle, they managed to pull it off and we were soon on our way to this semi-forested hill for a fantastic introduction to New Caledonia. With less than three hours of daylight left, people were not expecting, but the place delivered some exceptional birding. Most people headed straight into the forest, where mixed flocks contained Southern Shrikebill, Streaked Fantail, Yellow-bellied Robin, Melanesian Cuckooshrike and Melanesian Flycatcher.

But when word got out that the group that had opted to stay on the road had found 3 Horned Parakeets feeding in a flowering tree, everyone gathered at this site. There was exceptional birding from this vantage point, and in addition to cracking views of this stunning parakeet, we also had great looks at New Caledonian Friarbird, Barred Honeyeater, Green-backed White-eye, our only Metallic Pigeons of the trip, Fan-tailed Gerygone, and New Caledonian Myzomela – what a haul! Just below that was a small flock of Red-throated Parrotfinch which most people got on. Wandering back up to auberge for our pickup, we had a fantastic bonus of two Cloven-feathered Doves perched up in a tree and a small flock of Striated Starling. In short, it was phenomenal few hours and we had already seen almost all of the endemics!

The taxi fleet drove us back to the ship in the failing light and we returned to the ship. What a day it had been and the bird list was a lengthy affair tonight, followed by an early dinner and bed in anticipation for a very early start the next morning.

**April 6, 2010**

### **Riviere Bleu Provincial Park, New Caledonia**

Marie's voice woke us up at 3 am and after breakfast we all piled into our bus and headed for the famed Riviere Bleu Provincial Park. It was slightly more than an hour's ride and we then had to wait another half hour for our local guide, Jean-Marc to arrive and open the gate to the park. The bus took us as far as Pont Perignon where we crossed on foot and boarded our vans up to the forest edge.

Almost immediately we came across two of New Caledonia's hardest endemics – the first being a pair of New Caledonia Crow, actually using their sticks as tools to pry for insects in the trees. These would be our only crows of the trip and we often miss this species, so it was a stroke of good fortune! A few New Caledonian Parakeets also flew around and we eventually got onto a perched bird. Just down the road Jean-Marc was busy taping in Kagu. It took a few minutes, but one suddenly appeared! It was sitting there frozen but every so often would run forward to turn over a leaf and grab an insect. It generally came closer and closer allowing unbeatable views and great photographs. This is certainly the emblematic bird of the island and one of the real key species of the whole trip, so it was fantastic to get such great views of this monotypic family, endemic to New Caledonia!

After satisfying ourselves with this bird we carried on down the road towards the Grand Kaori. There was a light drizzle which eventually petered out and gave us a perfect morning with great bird activity. Most people caught up with the species they may have missed up Mt Koghi – the feeding flocks contained New Caledonian Friarbird, Southern Shrikebill, Streaked Fantail, Yellow-bellied Robin, Fan-tailed Gerygone, Melanesian Flycatcher, Melanesian Cuckooshrike, Green-backed White-eye and New Caledonian Flycatcher.

Suddenly the call went out that Rodney was watching a Crow Honeyeater and everyone promptly charged up the road and there they were – unbeatable looks at 3 Crow Honeyeaters feeding in some bright red flowers for several minutes; truly phenomenal looks at this elusive, bizarre and stunning honeyeater! Just as the honeyeaters departed, the radios buzzed with the word that Marie was watching a New Caledonian Imperial Pigeon; everyone promptly raced back up the road to get great views of this huge pigeon. While watching the pigeon, a New Caledonian Cuckooshrike popped into view and almost everyone got onto this often difficult species. Then David got a Cloven-feathered Dove in a scope so everyone raced back up the road to see this stunner. A pair of Long-tailed Trillers were here as well. Amazingly, we had essentially cleaned up after this exciting flurry of fantastic sightings.

We walked up to the Grand Kaori (an *Agathis* tree) and had lunch under its shadow. Everyone was in high spirits as we headed back down to the bridge to reassemble at the bus. From the bus we headed back to the park gate and spent half an hour wandering the grounds there. Birds seen here included New Caledonian Myzomela, Emerald Dove and a very flitty Red-throated Parrotfinch. We made one final stop down the road where a small flock of parrotfinches gave us a merry dance, but most people eventually got good looks. A Rufous Whistler was a nice bonus in here.

So we headed back to Noumea. Minutes later, Clive shouted out that there was a New Caledonian perched near the road. The bus driver was persuaded to pull over and we piled out. There it was—our 17<sup>th</sup> and final of the possible New Caledonian endemics. A clean sweep.

So everyone was elated (if a bit tired) when we got back to Noumea and headed back out towards the open ocean. Inside the reef were great flocks of Wedge-tailed Shearwaters and Black Noddies plus a couple of Osprey. Once passing out of the reef and bidding farewell to the pilot, we began to encounter more pelagic species – lots of Gould's Petrels, some Tahiti Petrels and another confusing rather long-winged small *Puffinus* shearwater.

Following a spectacular tropical sunset, everyone was in a jovial mood for the bird list. After dinner it was early to bed for most as it had been a long day!

**April 7, 2010**

**At sea along the coast of New Caledonia**

All day we cruised up the coast of New Caledonia, giving a good impression of just how big this island really is. We were cruising through the morning just off the shelf and the birding was excellent. Wedge-tailed Shearwater dominated the birding and their large feeding flocks were regularly encountered especially in the early morning hours. Tahiti Petrels were quite common today giving fantastic views of many of these spectacular petrels. This was also our best day for seeing Collared Petrels, and we succeeded in getting great looks at 5 different individuals, including 3 before breakfast, that included pale, intermediate, and dark morph. A couple of Gould's Petrels and some small flocks of Short-tailed Shearwater were also noted, along with a probably Sooty Shearwater.

It was Polynesian Storm-petrels that everyone was keen to find today and the early morning hours gave cause for hope as we quickly found some Wilson's Storm-petrels. The oil drip off the stern had regular visits by storm-petrels throughout the day, alas they invariably turned out to be Wilson's.

Tall vertical blows were seen before breakfast and the ship's course took us closer to the animals. We did manage to see the tall erect dorsal fin that indicated these animals were either Sei or Bryde's Whales, but we never got a conclusive identification on any of the three animals that we saw.

Also seen for the first time this morning was Brown booby and we would have several sightings throughout the day. When in the early afternoon there were a couple of possible sightings of Polynesian Storm-petrels, we laid down a very large fish-oil slick and spent nearly an hour cruising up and down it. The slick did draw in 4 Wilson's Storm-petrels which gave excellent views, alas the big one remained elusive.

Things got very quiet for the rest of the afternoon, however, late afternoon our first Red-footed Booby of the trip appeared and was soon accompanied by a juvenile. The two of them provided great entertainment over the next couple of hours by hunting flying fish that the ship was disturbing. Their acrobatics were fascinating to watch and eventually the adult at least was successful in grabbing a meal. As darkness approached and we headed indoors for the bird list, the two birds landed on their evening roost atop the ship.

After another fine dinner, Chris gave an excellent talk on the cetaceans of the Western Pacific, supported with his impressive collection of photos he has taken on this voyage over the past years.

**April 8, 2010**

**At sea en route Rennell Island**

We continued to work our way north through ever more tropical waters, the water temperature now was 27°C. The very last of the atolls north of New Caledonia was within sight as the sun rose and the birding was fast and frantic for the first hour of daylight. Huge flocks of Wedge-tailed Shearwaters were frantically diving into the water. Surprisingly within these flocks were several Tropical Shearwaters, a confusing "species" which we have never previously recorded in this area. A handful of people locked on to a close Polynesian Storm-petrel, but frustratingly it remained elusive to almost everyone on board. These flocks were also accompanied by a single Wilson's Storm-petrel and small numbers of Masked and Brown Booby, Sooty Tern and Black and Brown Noddy. A small group of flying squid were also seen.

After breakfast things got decidedly quiet and hot and birding slowed right down to "tropical doldrums" pace. A Red-footed Booby showed up again to catch flying fish but for the rest of the day the only birds recorded were the odd Wedge-tailed Shearwater, White-tailed Tropicbird, and Sooty Tern, along with at least 2 of our first Bridled Terns of the trip.

As the air cooled down in the late afternoon, everyone was back outdoors to enjoy a spectacular sunset and then to head in for a short birdlist. Following the birdlist, Norma read out the following poem, which she had composed:

## Norma's WPO poem

When my world had shrunk  
To my little wooden bunk  
I had time to meditate  
And think of each ship-mate.  
So with poetic licence free  
And an apology or three  
I offer up this little parody  
While we sail the surging sea.

Waving the flag for England grand,  
A dedicated birding band:  
Brian, with a smile and ready wit,  
The trademark of each true Brit,  
Travelling with his fellow kin  
Graham, Keith & Jonathon,  
So focussed on the sky above  
Can't miss a single tern or dove.  
David from the Isle of Wight  
Birds with all his power & might.  
Then there's the intrepid Helena  
With a different birding agenda  
At the helm Christopher Peter  
No voice can be sweeter  
Than that of experience  
For bird and cetacean;  
He knows exactly where  
To find what's lurking there

On board is a mermaid called Debbie  
It's thoroughly easy to see  
She's quite at home on the endless sea  
Whilst Warren's quite foreign  
He's eager to travel and the world unravel.  
David and dear little Minnie  
Chat and you'll make the discovery  
They're quite rare & think outside the square.

The bonds of birding are so strong  
That all are welcome and belong  
If you have binoculars about your neck  
And willing to stand for hours on deck  
You're related, what the heck!  
Like Guna from muggy Malaysia  
And the contingent from South Africa  
Rob and John that pelagic pair  
Who hail from the Cape so fair  
Are keen in their endeavour  
To capture each bird's beak and feather  
Then, strong and determined, there's Jim  
Surely no bird would dare evade him?

David & Lorraine, Clive & Mary  
Giles & Renee, Yvonne and her Tony  
Can share the pleasures of the trip  
On board this rocky plucky ship  
Like the twins, Alison and Heather  
Happily birds of a feather  
Must be grand to halve all tears & pain  
And relive pleasures twice again.

Scotland's here as well as Oz  
David & Pauline, Alan and Ros  
You can hear the accents strong and clear  
Reminding us in this world of wind and wave  
Of Scotland, home of the brave.

Then there's the crew, Russian-about  
And Marie's sweet morning wake up shout  
With Dean for support and Dr Rob  
Not snatched up yet? Quite a heart-throb!  
Adam from Canada too, a birding genius  
Who's gentle and helpful even tho' serious.  
The chefs Brad and Nicki what a team  
Menus for you and for me is all they dream  
Then there's Rodney with his Enderby  
Spirit of youth and adventure free.

Now who have I forgotten, I hope no one  
O yes, Adam, my own dear son  
Generous and caring, second to none!

Norma Riley  
8 April 2010  
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**April 9, 2010**

**At sea en route Rennell**

This was to be the quietest day of the trip so far. It started out with a few mixed flocks but even these disappeared for the most part as the heat and humidity soared. The main constituents of these feeding flocks were Wedge-tailed Shearwater and Sooty Tern. A couple of the flocks had Tropical Shearwater in them which gave us a few great views on the day. The only other tubenoses seen were Short-tailed Shearwater, Tahiti Petrel and Wilson's Storm-petrel, and all of these in very low numbers. These feeding flocks often have kleptoparasites attending them and over the day we recorded 5 Pomarine Skuas, as well as singles of both Lesser and Greater Frigatebird. On a couple of occasions we could see fish, sometimes very large fish jumping – at least one Yellowfin Tuna was identified.

It was uncomfortable enough that even most of the dedicated birders headed in doors for a little rest or to catch up on their photos. A few more flocks were noted mid afternoon but there were really no birds about for the best part of the afternoon. By late afternoon as the sun sank lower everyone was back out on deck to enjoy the last cool hour of daylight. The crew caught a barracuda off their line and a Red-footed Booby came in to check out the action.

Following the usual tropical sunset, it was time to head indoors for a very short birdlist. After dinner it was Christopher Peter giving us an introduction to Rennell Island and we all went to bed early in anticipation of an exciting morning at Rennell.

**April 10, 2010**

**Rennell Island**

Rodney and Adam headed ashore under the cover of darkness at 4 am to pick up the customs officers. Once they were roused from their sleep and brought on board, we waited for a bit of light before running everyone into shore; an easy landing protected by a coral reef.

Most of the group immediately set off for birding, climbing up the hill, through the village and quickly entering the forest. Within a few minutes, almost everyone had seen all 5 Rennell Islands endemics; at one point all 5 endemics were in the same feeding flock! Bare-eyed White-eyes were most numerous, but there were also several Rennell White-eyes around; a few Rennell Starlings fed in fruits in the treetops, while the normally skulking Rennell Fantail and Rennell Shrikebill were very obliging on this day. Once again we were abnormally lucky with the endemics.

It was already hot and muggy and the sun had barely rose, so we set about searching for some of the other target birds of these islands. Foremost of these is the Silver-capped Fruit-Dove, and we had many sightings of this stunning dove. The much larger Pacific Imperial Pigeon is also here and we all ended up with good looks at several of these. Mackinlay's Cuckoo-Dove was unusually scarce this year, but most people eventually caught up with this one. Another much wanted species was Finsch's Pymgy Parrot; this tiny parrot was certainly common as we often heard its high pitched call and saw it whizzing overhead; getting good looks was another matter, but several people did eventually succeed. Everyone also caught up with Singing Parrot and a few people even saw a Yellow-bibbed Lory; we have never seen this species here previously and it has much reduced yellow on the front compared to the birds on Guadalcanal. Moustached Treeswift was yet another much wanted bird and it perched obligingly on snags and flew overhead, giving great views of this stunning bird. The normally skulking Island Thrush fed on the forest trail a couple of times and remarkably almost everyone got to see this shy species.

Our foray into the forest had been a complete success, but with the heat rising, most of us opted to head back towards the beach. En route we passed through some secondary forest and the village. These areas held several new species, including Brown Goshawk, Australian Ibis, Shining Bronze Cuckoo (frequently heard but seen by only a few), Yellow-eyed Cuckooshrike, Fan-tailed Gerygone (here of a very distinctive form), Cardinal Myzomela and a Melanesian Flycatcher. Overhead were Osprey and Brahminy and a confusing assortment of *Collocalia* swiftlets; we felt confident we had identified Glossy and Uniform, but there were some other puzzling, at least some of which may have been White-rumped.

Passing through the village, we were met by friendly people and a very refreshing coconut. We continued on down to the beach where most of the locals had gathered, some of them selling their beautiful wood carvings. Most of us opted for a swim or a snorkel over the reef. It was a very good cool down and full of life. The hard corals were surrounded by tropical fish – regal angelfish were prominent here amongst an assortment of butterflyfish, triggerfish, damsels, wrasses and others; not to mention anemones, soft corals, starfish, clams, crabs and others. Indeed the diversity of life on the reef outshone the rainforest that we had spent the morning in!

The time had come to return to the ship, so leaving this tropical paradise (the only Polynesian island we would visit on the trip) behind, we sailed along the south and east coasts of Rennell and set a course to Makira Island. Frigatebirds of both species and boobies of all three species were abundant. The only tubenose recorded for the day was Wedge-tailed Shearwater. A few terns were also about including Black-naped and Sooty Tern and Black Noddy.



Well satisfied with a lovely day, we finished it off with a birdlist, dinner, and then Chris down in the lecture hall giving us a briefing for our day at Makira.

**April 11, 2010**

**Anuta/Makira Island**

At first light we were coming up to our anchorage off Anuta village. Following breakfast we were in the zodiacs and heading towards our intended landing at a logging road. On our way to the landing we were intercepted by some villagers who informed us they had not secured permission for us to use the logging road. Very disappointing news, but Chris quickly worked out a new plan for us to use a trail through some forest on the villager's land.

So all four zodiacs were launched and we navigated through a few reefs to land on a beach. A Beach Kingfisher perched on the shoreline was a nice bonus. We headed inshore as a big group and the coconut grove produced the first Makira endemic – Sooty Myzomela. Other birds in the coconut plantation were Willie Wagtail, Rufous Fantail, Cardinal Myzomela, Collared Kingfisher, Red-knobbed Imperial Pigeon and Rainbow Lorikeet. Once we got up to the forest edge, another endemic was encountered – the San Cristobal Melidectes. It generally stayed in the canopy but most people got decent views of it.

Now it was time to enter the forest and with such a big group on a narrow trail in the humid conditions, it was decidedly hard work. At a nice patch of forest, Chris taped in the endemic Ochre-headed Flycatcher; everyone got looks at this and it was a lifer for all (even Chris and Adam!). Higher up, we encountered fabulous views of a perched Chestnut-bellied Imperial Pigeon; we did record this species around here last year but this is a very poorly known species and there are very few records of it anywhere.

As we made our way back down the trail, we saw again the Ochre-headed Flycatcher, plus Chestnut-bellied Monarch and Golden Whistler. We paused at an overlook and were rewarded with another endemic – San Cristobal Starling. The beautiful White-headed Fruit Dove was calling in the distance, but sadly was not seen by anyone on this day. Two more Chestnut-bellied Imperial Pigeon were recorded from this overlook; clearly this area is globally significant for this species! Brahminy Kite, Singing Parrot, Yellow-eyed Cuckooshrike, Long-tailed Triller and another Chestnut-bellied Monarch were also seen from this advantageous viewpoint. Just before leaving the forest a final Makira endemic, the Mottled Flowerpecker was seen by most people.

Returning back to the boats, we had to wade out into the warm water to board the zodiacs. Just before departing a pair of Pied Goshawks came out and soared over the forest. The zodiacs then made their way back to Anuta village. Here we were warmly greeted by the locals who have very little contact with outsiders. The genuine warmth and friendliness of these people is always a highlight of a visit to the Solomons.

We had a bit of time to wander the village, chat with the locals, play soccer with the local kids, or just relax in the shade. Rodney and Adam decided to take an outrigger canoe for a paddle and promptly flipped it. The hardcore birders found Pacific Reef Egret, Osprey, Solomon Sea Eagle was spotted in the distance. Not the best views, but much appreciated by all.

After waving our goodbyes to the village, we returned to the ship where we had the chance to go for a refreshing swim, a number of people also did bommies off the bow.

After lunch we set a course for Guadalcanal and sailed in that direction for the remainder of the day. A handful of tubenoses were seen, including a Tropical Shearwater of the distinctive local (but undescribed) race. We also recorded a single Tahiti Petrel and Short-tailed Shearwater plus a few Wedge-tailed Shearwater. Occasional Brown Booby, Great Crested and Sooty Tern and Black and Brown Noddy rounded off the seawatch sightings. A single distant whale and a few dolphins were also seen but none identified.

With another very early morning in store we turned in for a birdlist, dinner, and then another briefing by Chris, this time on our plans for Guadalcanal.

**April 12, 2010**

**Mt Austen/Guadalcanal Island**

Breakfast was at 4 am, and after a quick bite we were being ferried in the darkness to the Honiara wharf. There we were met by our buses which took us up the bumpy road to Mt Austen. Arriving near the top in darkness we spent a while searching for Solomon Islands Hawk Owl. A distant bird was calling, but sadly we could not locate anything.

Arriving at the main birding area, we split into two groups; one group started at the top of the hill and birded downhill, the other group was ferried to the river at the bottom and birded their way up the hill. Both groups recorded a very similar set of birds and it was an extremely successful day.

The scrubby forest near the top was good for passerines: the endemic Black-headed Myzomela was seen up here although it was not as conspicuous as usual. Midget Flowerpecker was easier to see, along with Olive-backed Sunbird. White-bellied and Yellow-eyed Cuckooshrikes plus Cicadabird were all seen in small mixed species flocks. Chestnut-bellied Monarchs showed quite well and almost everyone got to grips with the normally elusive White-winged Fantail. Brown-winged and Metallic Starling were seen in small flocks along with Yellow-faced Myna. A few people saw Mackinlay's Cuckoo Dove, Cardinal Lory and Superb Fruit Dove and Finsch's Pygmy Parrot while everyone caught up with Yellow-bibbed Lory and Eclectus Parrot.

The somewhat taller forest on the bottom half of the road had a different selection of birds, including some of the best. Steel-blue Flycatcher was obliging and seen by all. Spectacular Claret-breasted Fruit Doves fed in fruiting trees. The ultra-elusive endemic Ultramarine Kingfisher is the most wanted bird on Mt Austen and was surprisingly seen by all! Buff-headed Coucal were a bit more problematic but eventually most people got onto this striking species. Two elusive ground doves were seen here, the downhill group had Stephan's Dove and the uphill group had Bronze Ground Dove; the former a WPO first!

The river itself offered a great vantage point for scanning and here we saw the much-wanted and normally elusive White-billed Crow, plus wonderful looks at Blyth's Hornbills and Ducorp's Cockatoo, the endemic Solomon Islands Cuckooshrike, a pair of Variable Goshawks, and another pair of Moustached Treeswift. A Little Pied Shag here was unexpected as it does not occur on this island according to Doughty et al. A Common Kingfisher was also fishing along the river.

Returning to our buses at the top and scanning over an advantageous viewpoint produced views of Pacific Baza, Brahminy Kite and good looks at 3 Solomons Islands Sea Eagle. The buses took us back to the wharf in Honiara and the zodiacs back to the ship.

Once aboard we set a course for Kolombangara Island and had an excellent afternoon sailing past Guadalcanal and the Russell Islands. From a birding standpoint, the most unusual sighting was a Bulwer's Petrel, which we have never recorded in this area before. Single Wedge-tailed and Short-tailed Shearwater were the only other tubenoses of the day; we also saw White-tailed Tropicbird, Brown Booby, Great and Lesser Frigatebirds, Great Crested, Bridled and Sooty Tern and Brown Noddy. A Red-footed Booby once again joined the ship and was hunting flying fish (quite successfully).

The afternoon was also surprisingly successful for cetaceans. A single Sperm Whale was seen well and was soon followed by a relatively large pod of blackfish. The majority of these were Short-finned Pilot Whale and they were showing quite well. At least 4 False Killer Whales appeared close to the ship and allowed great looks; there may well have been more. Soon after the blackfish a school of dolphins approached the bow. After some initial confusion about their identity, it became clear that these were Spinner Dolphins (nearly one hundred of them). A couple of them were bow-riding and it was fun to watch them swimming under the water. They headed off, and their remarkable spinning antics could be enjoyed.

A stunning tropical sunset capped off what had been easily one of the best days of the trip and we were all quite exhausted and ready to head in for birdlist, dinner, and an early night.

**April 13, 2010**

### **Kukudu/Kolombangara Island**

Most people were ready for a lie-in, but those who headed out on decks early were well rewarded with a Grey-backed Tern sitting on a coconut. A couple more Grey-backed Terns were seen after breakfast, but as usual most people failed to get a decent look at this elusive tern. Things were relatively quiet for much of the morning as we sailed near to Kolombangara, with its volcanic rim shrouded in mist. Mid morning Chris gave us a briefing for our planned afternoon excursion to Kolombangara.

Just before lunch we were nearing Kukudu area when we encountered several large feeding flocks which were dominated by Black Noddy. Suddenly things got very exciting when a Heinroth's Shearwater was spotted amongst the noddies and then 5 Heinroth's were all together. Most people got up to see them just before a big rain squall passed through. After the squall passed, we saw several more single Heinroth's and most people got decent views and even good photographs of this enigmatic species which we had never before encountered so close to this island.

The feeding flocks also contained at least one Tropical Shearwater, along with Wedge-tailed Shearwater, Brown Booby, Pomarine Skua, Lesser Frigatebird, Great Crested tern, Brown Noddy, Sooty Tern and a number of Bridled Tern. Several of the Bridled Terns were sitting on pieces of flotsam and gave us by far our best looks yet.

Just after lunch we launched the zodiacs and headed ashore in the hot and muggy conditions. Once ashore at the remarkably tidy Kukudu village, we split into two groups and headed into the forest. Birding was exceptionally slow going and hard work in the afternoon heat. Most people eventually caught up with two of the island's endemics – White-capped Monarch and Yellow-vented Myzomela and a handful saw Solomon Island White-eye but it was remarkably

elusive this year. Buff-headed Coucal was somewhat more obliging than the previous day and eventually everyone caught up with it. Cardinal Lory was much more common here than Mt Austen and everyone was treated to views of it. Amongst the few other species seen in the forest were Variable Goshawk, Superb and Claret-breasted Fruit Dove, Ducorp's Cockatoo, Finsch's Pymgy Parrot, Singing and Eclectus Parrot, Melanesian, Yellow-eyed and White-bellied Cuckoo-shrike, Steel-blue Flycatcher and Yellow-faced Myna.

Some of the best birding was in the more open area around the village and some of the group were treated to a close flyby of Duchess Lorikeet. Other birds in the village environs included Purple Swamphen, Red-knobbed Imperial Pigeon, Rainbow Lorikeet, Glossy, White-rumped, and Uniform Swiftlet, Moustached Treeswift, Willie Wagtail, Olive-backed Sunbird, and Metallic and Singing Starling. Scanning around the creek at the landing was particularly productive and gave us Pacific Reef Egret, Striated Heron, Pacific Black Duck, Osprey, Pacific Baza, Brahminy Kite, Solomon Islands Sea Eagle, Common Kingfisher and Blyth's Hornbill.

The group reassembled at 1630 and set about on quest to find one of the most interesting birds on the island – the Roviana Rail. This rail was only described to science in the early 90s and the Kukudu village area is one of its strongholds, it is often seen right in the village. We set out to an area where we have found it with relative ease in the past, but nearly an hour there and we struck out. We pushed back our departure time and scoured the village and surrounding areas until nearly dark. Some of us did hear it and a very luck few people did see it cross a track, but ultimately, most of us would have to leave empty handed – a frustrating result for a bird that we normally find with relative ease.

So it had not been our best afternoon of birding, but it was time to bid farewell to the island and the Solomons in general and head off in search of new seabirds. Following birdlist and dinner, it was another early night for everyone.

**April 14, 2010**

#### **At sea off the Bouganville Coast**

Today we would be sailing north along the Bouganville coast. We were in relatively deep water for much of the day. We were not far from the coastline, but we were also not far from the Planet Deep Trench which goes to almost 9,000 meters depth! There was much excitement for this day as in the past it has been excellent for seeing Heinroth's Shearwater and has been a great area for cetaceans. The morning started off well with some Sperm Whale sighted. We spent the next couple hours cruising through a loose group of at least 12 Sperm Whales and had some fantastic encounter with these remarkable beasts including two that came also directly under the bow and could even be watched swimming under water. In this area there was also a tantalizing sighting of an all dark petrel. It was initially thought to be a Bulwer's Petrel, but appeared too large for that species. No photos were taken and we can only speculate on what it really was.

However, following this exciting start, things got frustratingly quiet for the remainder of the morning and well into the afternoon. We did log a few Tahiti Petrel and Wedge-tailed Shearwater, Brown and Red-footed Booby (more flying fish hunting!), a phalarope, a Pomarine Skua, and a few Great Crested and Sooty Tern, Black and Brown Noddies. A Grey-backed Tern was seen by a handful and a Wilson's Storm-petrel appeared late afternoon. Alas, the hoped for Heinroth's Shearwater just did not appear, so we felt fortunate for our unexpected encounter off Kolombangara. A couple of smallish looking *Pseudobulwerias* were seen late in the day; they may have been Beck's Petrels but in the failing light nobody got a decent view.

The cetacean watching picked up late afternoon with a few pods of dolphin and blackfish appearing, but very little could be identified. We did have a pod of 8 False Killer Whales that made a close approach allowing a few photographs to be taken. Undoubtedly the highlight of the day was a Pygmy Sperm Whale that was logging at close quarters. This species is probably quite rare and is also quite difficult to identify under most conditions, but the excellent views and photographs taken left little doubt as to the identity of this species! Shortly after this, a beaked whale was also seen rolling several times; it was suspected to be Blainville's, but we just never got conclusive identification of it.

It had been a tiring, hot day out on decks so we were all ready for a drink and a birdlist before dinner with another big day of seawatching ahead of us.

**April 15, 2010**

#### **At sea off New Ireland**

Daybreak found us sitting off Cape St George at the southern tip of New Ireland. This has historically been our best area for finding Beck's Petrel and that was definitely the bird we were looking for today. Adam started chumming for it off the stern with rotting fish guts, but apart from a surprise Common Tern, a few Noddies and a Lesser Frigatebird, the chum was having little affect. After well over an hour, two birds suddenly appeared in the chum slick; although there was some debate over their identity it was eventually concluded that both of these birds were Tahiti. The birds drifted off and were suddenly joined by a Beck's Petrel. The views were admittedly a bit distant but it was a stroke of luck to have the Beck's side by side with two Tahitis for such a convincing size comparison!

Another or the same Beck's was seen off the bow for much closer looks and so we decided to set a course northwards for Micronesia. A flock of over 30 Red-necked Phalarope and our first Streaked Shearwater of the trip were also noted, along with a Sperm Whale and unidentified rorqual before we started the engines.

There were high hopes for the day sailing up New Ireland and it did not disappoint, even if the day was somewhat quieter than we have had in the past. More Beck's Petrel were seen occasionally throughout the day and we logged a total of 6 Beck's for the day, not bad for a species that was lost to science until 3 years ago!! A few more of the large Streaked Shearwater were seen; Wedge-tailed Shearwater were remarkably few in number today. Several Red-footed Booby and 2 Brown Booby were seen along with singles of both species of frigatebird. Mid morning a dark morph Pomarine Skua flew low over the stern and we rewarded with some chum scraps. A few more confusing pale terns were seen, but we did only identify Bridled and Sooty Tern.

On the cetacean front a number of blackfish were seen again but identification proved difficult as usual; we did see a small pod of the distinctive Short-finned Pilot Whale, along with a close approach by at least 4 False Killer Whale. A pair and a single Dwarf Sperm Whale were all seen very well and photographed. A moderately distant pod of dolphins eventually revealed themselves as Spinners and quite surprisingly those were the only dolphins we managed to identify in this area which normally has several species. A beaked whale also passed directly under the bow; once again it was not conclusively identified but it was thought to be Blainville's again.

There was some dramatic weather in the afternoon with some impressive squalls passing through and the dark clouds and dark ocean created a stunning effect. On two occasions we saw a water spout. By late afternoon we passed the Feni Islands and towards dusk we were nearing the Tanga Islands, the last bit of land between PNG and Micronesia.

Any day with 6 Beck's Petrel is undoubtedly a good day, so we were all well pleased to head at day's end for a couple beers while we logged the day's list; then had dinner; watched "Life on the Air" starring David Attenborough and Michael Palin.

**April 16, 2010**

**At sea en route Truk**

Welcome to the dead zone. Sailing through the heart of the tropical Pacific, one realizes that the ocean truly is a vast desert and that the Pacific is the biggest of these deserts. It was a showery morning and there were almost no birds about. Most people opted to catch up on photographs, sleep, or reading. We aired two series of Planet Earth in the lecture hall. A few hardcore birders kept watch on deck and tallied Wedge-tailed Shearwater, Brown and Red-footed Booby, and Sooty Tern for their efforts. There was a tantalizing all dark *Pterodroma* seen, but it got away unidentified.

After lunch, there was increased wind and an easterly swell began to build. The bouts of rain intensified and folks spent even less time on deck. A Bulwer's Petrel was seen, no doubt the bird of the day. We also added two Wilson's Storm-petrel, a White-tailed Tropicbird, a Lesser Frigatebird, Pomarine and Long-tailed Skua and a Brown Noddy to the day's list, bringing the total to 10 species for the day. The only cetacean was a loose group of Sperm Whale – 8 animals were counted although most were rather distant.

It was rather windy outside as we all headed indoors for birdlist and dinner. At 2050 we crossed the equator. Everyone crowded on the bridge to get a shot of the gps reading 00°00' and then assembled on the floodlit front deck. King Neptune (played by Rodney Russ) soon appeared, followed by his entourage including the lovely mermaid (played by Natasha). After a speech, all Pollywogs were forced to present themselves for inspection to King Neptune. Once they had kissed a barracuda held by Davey Jones (played by Chris Collins) the Pollywogs were presented their certificate, a glass of champagne, and welcomed into the group of Shellbacks. A Red-footed Booby roosting above our heads watched the comedy unfold and northwards we sailed into the northern hemisphere.

**April 17, 2010**

**At sea en route Truk**

The morning started out well – rather sunny conditions and a gentle breeze. 4 Bulwer's Petrel were tallied over the course of the morning and almost everyone got good views of this unusual tropical tubenose. Other highlights of the morning included two new birds for the trip – Leach's Storm-petrel and Arctic Skua (finally!). Most of the Wedge-tailed Shearwaters seen today were of the light morph and a single Streaked Shearwater was a surprise. Sooty Tern was the most common bird of the day and the only other species encountered were Wilson's Storm-petrel, White-tailed Tropicbird and Long-tailed Skua. A group of smallish-looking Spinner Dolphins gave a nice performance just in front of the bow.

The rain returned late morning and it rained almost non-stop (sometimes lightly, sometimes heavily) for the rest of the day. There were very few people out on deck and very few birds seen during the afternoon. Brad and Nicki kept us well fed with three square meals and there were also two more episodes of Planet Earth to watch in the lecture hall.

**April 18, 2010**  
**Truk Lagoon**

The morning produced few birds, but perhaps the greatest ornithological surprise of the trip. A curlew flew around the ship for a few minutes and proved to be a Bristle-thighed Curlew, a new bird for the WPO and one of the oddest sightings ever on this trip. It proved the adage that any bird can show up any where and at any time! Apart from this unexpected excitement, things were relatively quiet through the morning. Single Bulwer's Petrel and Wedge-tailed Shearwater were the only tubenoses for the morning and we also recorded two Long-tailed Skuas and quite a few White Terns. By late morning we had had our first sightings of land – one of the atolls of Truk Lagoon.

Birding picked up considerably as we neared the entrance to the lagoon. Of particular interest were 6 Tropical Shearwaters; the form that breeds here looks much different than the forms we see further south (around the Solomons and New Caledonia). There were some very large feeding flocks dominated by White Terns, Black Noddies and Brown Noddies. We also picked out White-tailed Tropicbird, Brown Booby, Pomarine Skua, and Black-naped Tern. Spinner Dolphins were again seen and a small pod of Bottlenose Dolphins came close into the ship riding alongside and giving some great views.

Once inside the entrance the pilot came aboard and guided us towards Weno Island. As we neared the island everyone was on board to see us come alongside the small wharf of Moen town. The birders had their scopes out and picked out several waders – Whimbrel, Ruddy Turnstone and Wandering Tattler, plus Pacific Reef-Egret.

A whopping total of 11 customs agents came aboard and it was an agonizingly slow process to clear us. The birders stayed on top and started finding several of the Micronesian landbirds. Views were a bit distant, but we were able to get our first looks at Crimson-crowned Fruit Dove, Caroline Islands Swiftlet (many), Micronesian Myzomela and Micronesian Starling. Towards dusk 4 Rufous Night Herons were seen flying around, our only ones of the trip.

We were finally cleared by customs just as darkness fell and it was time for dinner. Everyone opted to stay on board rather than brave the streets of Moen in the dark! Following dinner Christopher Peter gave us an introduction to the birds of Truk and Rodney explained the plans, giving two options. The more adventurous option would be a long zodiac ride and a steep climb up Tol South, while those wishing to take it easy could do their own thing on Weno Island.

**April 19, 2010**  
**Tol South and Weno Island**

Another early morning start and a 5 am breakfast. A number of people had opted to stay on Weno Island. Some had a pleasant walk around town and snorkeled off the regenerating reef in front of the Truk Stop. Others went birding up to the Japanese Gun and had a very successful morning seeing almost all of the endemic birds that occur on Weno Island, including the beautiful Caroline Islands Ground Dove.

The majority of the group were keen to try for the adventurous option and boarded the zodiacs. It was a rather uneventful hour long ride to a small village on Tol South, where we were met by our "birding-gangster" guides. It became obvious right off the bat that this was going to be a steep climb and it was! The forest edge produced plentiful numbers of Micronesian Myzomela, Micronesian Starling and few Caroline Islands White-eye. Once we climbed into some secondary forest we started to see our first Oceanic Flycatchers. The majority of the group were keen to get up into higher elevations so we pushed upwards and the trail became less steep higher up.

A grassy clearing held Caroline Islands Reed Warbler and Blue-faced Parrotfinch and from there we headed into a patch of decent forest networked by trenches the Japanese had dug during World War II. Suddenly Rob spotted the ultimate prize – Faichuk White-eye and so we became amongst the first people ever to see this extremely endangered and localized bird. We only saw the one bird and it showed extremely well for all. Well worth the climb! There were a few other birds flying around, including Oceanic Flycatchers and myzomelas. Suddenly a pair of the stunning Truk Monarch popped into view; the birds were furtive and not everyone got on them but those who did were thrilled to have seen this other highly localized, poorly known and rarely seen species.

We spent considerable time at this spot, but the monarchs failed to reappear. And the time had come to head back down towards the village. Pausing along a forest stream, Caroline Islands Ground Dove was found sitting above our heads and fantastic views were had by all. It was a clean sweep. Now all we had to do was get back to the village, which proved to be the hardest part of the walk. But everyone made it eventually and we were greeted by an ice cold coconut back in the village before boarding the zodiacs.

The wind had kicked up a notch and we had to head into it. We did take a circuitous route back to Weno and after a bumpy two hour ride, everyone returned safe and sound to the ship having had a fantastic adventure and seen some extraordinary birds. Soon after our late lunch it was time to head back out to the lagoon entrance and into the open ocean.

A small pod of Bottlenose Dolphin again came in and escorted our ship. Large mixed flocks of terns were about again and the Tropical Shearwaters showed very well right near the lagoon entrance with a total of 19 birds logged and great views for most people. Leaving the shelter of the reef we were back into the open ocean where a fair swell was running and as we set a course for the northwest we took the swell right on the beam so it was a rolly night ahead.

**April 20, 2010**

**At sea en route Torishima**

The swell actually increased over night and there was quite a swell running today – the biggest of the trip so far. With waves spraying right over the monkey, there were very few people out on decks and most stayed indoors relaxing. We aired a well attended documentary on the shipwreck diving at Truk lagoon along with another episode of Planet Earth.

The seabird pickings were pretty slim today. A Streaked Shearwater was quite a surprise, but more expected species were Wedge-tailed Shearwater (again mostly light morphs), White-tailed Tropicbird, Red-footed and Brown Booby, and Sooty Tern. Just six species. All in all the quietest day of the trip.

In the evening Chris sparked our interest by showing us pictures of the seabirds we could look forward to later in the week as we neared the cooler Japanese waters. The ship continued to roll her way northwards.

**April 21, 2010**

**At sea en route Torishima**

Today was another very quiet day at sea. In fact so quiet that not a single bird was seen all morning. Chris made up a bird quiz : Chris' Big Bad Birding Bonanza.

In the afternoon we aired the final episode of Planet Earth and the birding picked up substantially. There was a small flock of Short-tailed Shearwater and both Red-tailed and White-tailed Tropicbird were seen, along with a single Brown Booby. A Pomarine Skua gave an excellent flyby and a Long-tailed Skua was also recorded. The highlight of the day, however, came late afternoon when a Matsudaira's Storm-petrel was found in the wake. It showed off and on in the wake for the last hour of daylight and was a lifer for most.

The winds finally began to drop off and the swell lowered as we continued northwards. Heading indoors, we got the answers to the quiz – winners were Giles and Renee. Following our very short birdlist and dinner, we had a group identification workshop in the lecture hall where we looked at photographs taken over the course of the trip of unidentified seabirds. As expected, we left with more questions than answers, but we all learned something from the discussion.

**April 22, 2010**

**At sea en route Torishima**

Better sailing conditions today as we sailed northwards not far to the east of the Marianas Islands. Matsudaira's Storm-petrel was back in the wake early and joined by at least 3 Leach's Storm-petrel giving great views and photographs as well. A Wilson's Storm-petrel also appeared briefly in the wake; a good day for stormies! We also had a couple small flocks of Short-tailed Shearwater and 2 Sootys to round out the tubenoses for the day. Some large feeding flocks of Sooty Tern were also seen along with very small numbers of Brown Booby, Pomarine Skua and White Tern. Slowly but surely we were leaving the dead zone behind us and getting back into good birding country.

Chris gave an another bird quiz, which was won by Jonathan. We also aired two more Attenborough documentaries – Blue Planet and Birds of Paradise. Tonight in the bar was a tropical themed cocktail party and everyone showed up in their finest and loudest tropical garb and sipped cocktails. Dinner was a buffet and although most went to bed, a handful stayed up past midnight to watch a meteor shower from the top deck.

**April 23, 2010**

**At sea en route Torishima**

Light winds today made for pleasant sailing conditions. We were over the Marianas Trench today, the world's deepest bit of water. At times we had more than 6,000 meters of water beneath our hull. We were sailing off the northern Marianas Island; for a while we could see Asuncion Island. Bird life was picking up noticeably and we felt we had emerged from the dead zone. Most of the birding action was centered around feeding flocks and it was pretty patchy.

The bird highlight of the day for most was Bonin Petrel – we recorded our first in the morning and ended up with four for the day, although not everyone got on this fast flying bird. Matsudaira's Storm-petrel numbers increased and we logged 6 for the day; along with single Wilson's and Leach's. Other tubenoses included single Bulwer's Petrel, a few Short-tailed Shearwater and good numbers of pale phase Wedge-tailed Shearwater.

The northern Marianas hold some large seabird breeding colonies and our close proximity to them meant that we could enjoy our last good numbers of most of the tropical shearwaters – we had good looks at both Red-tailed and White-tailed Tropicbird, as well as all three species of booby (Masked, Red-footed, and Brown) which for one last time could be enjoyed hunting flying fish. Single Pomarine and Arctic Skuas were seen and big flocks of Sooty Tern also included lots of White Tern, Brown Noddy and Black Noddy.

Conditions were reasonable for spotting cetaceans, but we had little luck. A moderate sized rorqual (perhaps a Bryde's) put in a very close but brief appearance and late in the day a small pod of dolphins appeared; photographs later showed that they were most likely Striped Dolphin.

Perhaps the highlight of the day was yet to come as sunset finally produced a Green Flash; Chris and Rob even managed photos of the event! So following this excitement it was bird list and dinner. To cap the day, David gave us a very informative presentation on the work of the Albatross Task Force.

**April 24, 2010**

**At sea en route Torishima**

The wind had picked up a bit again as we sailed northwards along the Marianas Trench. Birding today was very good. The day started out with several small shearwaters; although these were at the time thought to be Bannerman's Shearwater, they were subsequently re-identified as Tropical Shearwaters based on photos. We saw a few more small shearwaters throughout the day, but all of them appeared to be Tropicals. Bonin Petrels put in regular, if brief, appearances throughout the day and most people eventually caught up with this species. A single Bulwer's Petrel, the last of the trip, was also recorded. Wedge-tailed Shearwaters were abundant again today, all birds being of the pale morph.

The wake was the place to be today and our oil drip brought in a lot of stuff. After a three week hiatus, Flesh-footed Shearwater reappeared on the bird list, with about 4 different birds visiting the wake. Of course, it was mostly storm-petrels we were looking for and Matsudaira's Storm-petrel dominated the wake. They were around all day and numbers built to almost 30 birds by afternoon. Both Wilson's and Leach's Storm-petrels were also picked out and late afternoon, a single Tristram's was seen and photographed amongst the throng of Matsudaira's in the wake. Only a few people got on this bird though. Shortly after the excitement of the Tristram's, our only South Polar Skua of the trip also came by. The only other birds for the day were Red-tailed Tropicbird, Pomarine Skua, Sooty Tern and White Tern.

Cetaceans were few in number today, but we had a couple of dramatic Sperm Whale sightings. The first was of two rather distant animals that spent a great deal of time breaching and tail slapping. None onboard had ever seen such active behavior from a Sperm Whale – it must have breached in excess of ten times. Later in the day, another Sperm Whale logged right off the bow allowing a close approach and fantastic views.

Indoors, Nicki and Brad gave us a galley tour in addition to providing us with three square meals, and we aired another Blue Planet episode. It was Saturday night movie night in the lecture hall and we ended the day with the film the Da Vinci Code.

**April 25, 2010**

**At sea off the Bonins**

Most people were out early this morning as we cruised along the edge of the exceptionally deep (9,000 meter plus) Bonin Trench; just to the east of the Bonin Islands. It was relatively calm early in the morning, but the wind kicked up from the east and developed into a strong swell. For the first time since leaving New Zealand, people needed to wear sweaters!

We were hoping to find Bannerman's Shearwater, but we did not find any. Regardless, the birding was nothing short of fantastic for the morning. Bonin Petrel was one of the most common species and we saw more than 100. Some of them flew right in front of the bow giving exceptional views and good photographs of this fast-flying species. A Kermadec Petrel, absent for over two weeks made an appearance. Wedge-tailed Shearwaters were out in droves and hundreds of them were observed often in large flocks. A few Matsudaira's Storm-petrels were about especially early in the morning, but they were quickly outnumbered by Tristram's Storm-petrel and eventually everyone caught up with the latter species. We spotted two rather large flocks of Tristram's, bringing the day's tally to over 100 birds. 3 Leach's Storm-petrels were also logged for the morning. It was also our last chance to watch some tropical birds: Brown Booby put on a fantastic performance flying around the ship at close range for much of the morning, along with a single Red-footed Booby. We also observed our last Sooty Tern and Brown Noddy of the trip.

The first northern hemisphere albatross was seen before breakfast - a distant Black-footed Albatross. Following breakfast, there was up to three birds following in the wake off and on giving everyone excellent views at this small albatross. Mid afternoon, during a quiet period when few people were out on deck, a Short-tailed Albatross flew past. Those who were out got great views of this much-wanted seabird, but the majority of the group missed it. Shortly after

this sighting we decided to start chumming. It did not take long before a horde of Wedge-tailed Shearwater came charging in, joined by small numbers of Flesh-footed and Streaked Shearwater. Black-footed Albatross quickly joined in the scrum and we eventually had at least 10 birds. Then much to everyone's delight, a Laysan Albatross came in and joined the feeding frenzy giving more fantastic views and photo-ops. It was joined by a second Laysan as the day drew to an exciting close. Just before dark a small pod of Pantropical Spotted Dolphins made a brief appearance, although they were only seen by a small percentage of the group.

So it was a content and excited group that headed back indoors for the birdlist and dinner. As we sailed north towards Torishima, the wind started to drop off.

### **April 26, 2010** **At sea off Torishima**

The seas had calmed down significantly over night. At sunrise, 0500, we were still some distance to the south of Torishima. We started our chumming effort at dawn, but apart from a small number of Black-footed Albatross, the birds were showing very little interest in our chum. A Short-tailed Albatross was seen before breakfast, but again most people missed it.

Shortly after breakfast, an adult Short-tailed Albatross was found sitting on the water and the captain turned the ship towards it. Everyone got out on deck and finally we all scored great views of this mega-seabird. The bird took off and disappeared. Conditions were beautiful as we passed Torishima at 12 miles and remained calm through the morning as we sailed north. There were few birds about, but we did have a steady following of Black-footed Albatross and there were regular sightings of Streaked Shearwater. Flocks of Short-tailed Shearwater piled north, undoubtedly migrating towards their feeding grounds further north. A Band-rumped Storm-petrel was seen by some and photographed, a good record of a WPO-first! A couple each of Leach's and Tristram's Storm-petrels were also seen. Small groups of Red-necked Phalarope were also relatively easy to pick out in the calm conditions. A Whimbrel was also spotted migrating north. There were a couple more sightings of Short-tailed Albatross, but nothing close. A few rorquals were seen; one animal came very close and was almost certainly a Sei Whale.

After lunch conditions were even better and the seas became glassy calm. Mid afternoon, an alcid was observed, presumably Japanese Murrelet, but not identified with certainty. Things really picked up from that point on. Small numbers of Red Phalarope were seen on the water. Another beautiful South Polar Skua was seen, along with more Pomarine and Long-tailed Skua. The numbers of Short-tailed Shearwater continued to build and flocks of other a thousand birds started to pass the ship. The most surprising sighting of the afternoon was a ratty-looking Northern Fulmar sat on the water: a new bird for the WPO! A pair of Storm-petrels that were seen rather distantly sat on the water looked interesting; some people felt they were Swinhoe's but this was not the unanimous consensus.

The glassy calm conditions were ideal for spotting cetaceans and after a few unidentified dolphins, we got really good looks at a small pod of Risso's Dolphin. Not long after some beaked whales showed well, if somewhat distant. They caused considerably confusion at the time, but Chris' photos show that they were Hubb's Beaked Whale. His photo of an adult male must be one of the only ones in existence and we can consider ourselves exceptionally fortunate to be able to observe (and identify!) this very poorly known Mesoplodont! Rather surprisingly we also observed numerous turtles, some of them giving pretty good looks from the ship – the majority of these were the enormous Leatherback Turtle. Just before dusk, a small pod of Striped Dolphin came in to investigate the ship and bow-ridged for a short time giving some fantastic views.

It had been a long day and it was not over yet. In the bar, Norma awarded her Orders of Merit to all of us. Following bird list and dinner, we had David the Auctioneer leading the charity auction for Albatross Task Force. It was a fun night with plenty of champagne, some excellent items and \$450 raised for Albatross Task Force. The final item of Chef Brad ended in a bidding war between Dr Rob and Norma. Lucky for Brad that Norma won!

### **April 27, 2010** **Miyake-jima to Yokohama**

As the forecast for the following day was poor and our planned visit to Miyake-jima in serious doubt, we decided to maximize our chances at finding Japanese Murrelet this morning. We cruised past their breeding rocks at daybreak and it did not take long to find our first. There was a steady passage with most birds whirring past the bow, but a few were eventually seen and photographed sitting right on the water. Over the next couple hours we recorded about 80 birds, our best ever showing on this species. Apart from the murrelets, the water was absolutely steaming with birds. It was an incredible spectacle. Short-tailed Shearwaters were everywhere that you looked. Even more amazingly Tristram's Storm-petrels were everywhere that you looked! There were at least many thousands (if not tens of thousands) of both species. There were also hundreds of Streaked Shearwater and a few Flesh-footed and Sooty Shearwater as well. Black-footed Albatross were regularly seen and much to our surprise we also recorded 4 Short-tailed and 3 Laysan Albatross. Some people even got a photo of all 3 species in the same shot!!



As we entered into calmer waters, another surprise was waiting for us: Ancient Murrelet and Rhinoceros Auklet. We had good numbers of both of these alcids over the next couple hours, neither species of which has ever been recorded before on the WPO! The harbour was full of Short-tailed Shearwaters and we picked up a lot of coastal birds: lots of cormorants (at least a few of which were Japanese), Grey Herons, Black-eared Kite, a skua slam (South Polar, Pomarine, Arctic and Long-tailed), Black-tailed, Herring, and Slaty-backed Gull, Common Tern.

Yokohama is one of the busiest ports in the world and we passed dozens of ships and even 2 large submarines as we came in. Once we were finally alongside, we left the ship to clear customs. The afternoon was free to wander and those who went into town picked up a nice selection of birds: Brown-eared Bulbul, Dusky Thrush, Eastern Great Tit, Japanese White-eye, Large-billed and Carrion Crow, Eurasian Tree Sparrow, White-cheeked Starling, White and Japanese Wagtail and Oriental Greenfinch.

It was a peaceful night's sleep alongside the wharf.

### **April 28, 2010**

#### **Yokohama**

Rodney made the decision not to return to the Izu Islands due to the gale warnings, but rather to stay alongside at Yokohama for the day. We awoke to heavy rain and decided to put on hold any birding plans for the morning. It was a lazy morning around the ship for most as the rain poured down outside. A few adventurous folks headed into town and got soaked wandering the streets and parks of Yokohama.

The forecast for the afternoon was that the rain would ease, so most people decided to venture into town. Some people found wooded parks in Yokohama where good birding was had; others joined Chris and Adam on an excursion into Port Tokyo Wild Bird Park. Between the group, we recorded many species, if nothing exceptional. Many of the species were new for the trip and many were write-ins, species never before seen on the WPO. These included Little Grebe, Eastern Spot-billed Duck, Eurasian Teal, Common Pochard, Tufted Duck, Greater Scaup, Eurasian Kestrel, Terek Sandpiper, Common Greenshank, Brown-headed Thrush, Long-tailed Tit, Crested Myna, White-cheeked Starling, Japanese Wagtail, Olive-backed Pipit, and Hawfinch! The afternoon was even relatively dry and pleasant.

Everyone gathered in the bar for one final birdlist and then it was off to our final dinner of the trip. After dinner we gathered as a group one last time for a disembarkation briefing and a trip recap.

### **April 29, 2010**

#### **Disembarkation**

After breakfast it was time to leave our home of the past 30 days. The odyssey was complete. It was an exceptional journey and as we go on our separate ways, we will always remember those days sailing through the Pacific, the rare seabirds, the many landbirds, the friendly people we met along the way, and the companions we shared the odyssey with. Thanks for traveling with us and we hope to see you again some day onboard the Spirit of Enderby.

