



Southern *Bird*

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Australian Odyssey
New Zealand Storm Petrel
Breeding Site Discovered
Extreme Birding

Never would I have imagined that going to the OSNZ Conference and AGM in Tauranga last June would result in my winning a dream vacation! I and, presumably everyone else at the meeting, were extremely excited to hear that Heritage Expeditions had generously donated a spot on their upcoming Australian Bight Voyage, an eight day pelagic adventure on the *Spirit of Enderby* from Albany, Western Australia to Hobart, Tasmania.

I had to travel to Australia for work in mid-November. I was not due back in the office until mid-December so I decided to turn my trip into an 18-day birding odyssey. I spent my first day birding in the Australian National Botanical Gardens in Canberra. I was shown around by Dr. Kristal Cain, a visiting fellow at the Australian National University who is studying Superb Fairy-wren behaviour. I accompanied Dr. Cain while she collected data for her study on female song and aggression. She explained these fairy-wrens are atypical passerines; the females are

very aggressive and territorial and many of these behaviours are expressed by song. However, while poking around I discovered that males also get rather irritated if you accidentally get too close to their nests.

From Canberra I travelled to Albany (via Perth). Arriving two days before the ship was due to depart I rented a car and visited some key birding spots around town (I can highly recommend Lake Seppings), then hit the road. My destination was the Yongergnow Australian Malleefowl Centre. The centre is a run by the people of the community Onegurup. They are dedicated to saving the endangered Malleefowl through education and habitat conservation. It was inspirational to see how much they have achieved.

From there I travelled to the Stirling Range Retreat. This place is a wonderful retreat, not just for travellers but for feathered friends as well. There are many trails in the area through a variety of habitats, and, what's more, the

owners of the retreat have set-up water baths at numerous sites, creating little bird oases. My final birding effort in Western Australia was an attempt to track down the Western Spinebill on the Mt. Trio trail in Stirling Range National Park. I was unsuccessful in my Spinebill hunt, but I was rewarded for my climbing efforts with a beautiful view of a Little Eagle nest.

On December 2nd, I boarded the *Spirit of Enderby* with 34 other guests. There was a lot of excited energy as we set sail, and we were all thrilled to see a pod of Common Dolphins playing at the bow of the ship. A wide range of people were on board; ages spanned from 32 to 82! There was also a wide range of 'birdiness', with quite a few hardcore birders (one of which was doing an Australia big year and already had over 700 species!) but also numerous non-birders who were there for the adventure of the journey.

The first couple of days offered limited birding opportunities. The weather was warm and there was very little wind, which made for lovely

AUSTRALIAN ODYSSEY



Me in my happy place

Tasmanian Native-hen

travel but meant that there were not very many birds on the wing. The main visitors were Great-winged Petrels and Flesh-footed Shearwaters. It was helpful that things started off as slowly as they did as it gave me a chance to learn the nuances of identifying southern seabirds from a distance. It was also nice to have some calm weather to allow my body to adjust to being on a boat without suffering from too many bouts of DIY chumming (sea sickness)!

Midway through our trip we had a day of beautiful sunshine with not a breath of wind. These were not great conditions for birding, but the resulting flat water meant that we could see any cetacean that broke the surface of the water, and break the surface they did! We saw a Blue Whale, Bottlenose Dolphins, a pod of over a hundred Southern Right Whale Dolphins swimming with Long-finned Pilot Whales, a Sperm Whale, and over a thousand Common Dolphins. At one point there were so many

dolphins riding the waves at the bow of the ship that I could actually hear their squeaks and clicks. It was amazing!

The final couple of days were a bit more windy and choppy, which allowed the crew to attempt some chumming. The smell of fish oil and fish meat brought in quite a few petrels and albatrosses. It was a particular treat for me to see Campbell Albatross, as my fiancée has been working down on Campbell Island. As we entered the waters surrounding Tasmania the number of birds steadily increased. When we laid anchor for our final night on board we were treated to ribbons of thousands of Short-tailed Shearwaters weaving past the ship. The final delight of the trip was not of the avian variety, but the culinary type. The two chefs on board outdid themselves when they created one of the best roast dinners on the planet.

After a sad farewell to my fellow passengers I headed out for the final leg of my birding

odyssey. Renting a campervan I split my time between three national parks: Bruny Island, Mt. Field, and Tasman. Bruny Island was by far my favourite. The camp grounds were gorgeous and I easily managed to see all 12 Tasmanian endemics, Tasmanian Native-hen being my favourite. They reminded me of their New Zealand relative, the Pukeko, especially when they darted in front of the van on country roads. What Bruny Island had in birds, Mt. Field had in monotremes (egg-laying mammals). I saw both a Platypus and an Echidna in less than 24 hours. My final bird species for the trip was seen on the way back to the car hire agency; a beautiful flock of Cape Barren Geese. It was the perfect bird to finish my trip list. I managed to see 169 species and about a third of them were lifers.

I would like to thank Heritage Expeditions and the staff and crew of the *Spirit of Enderby*. You made it a trip of a lifetime! I am also grateful to Sian Reynolds for helping me to get there.

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All photos by Sarah Jamieson



Campbell Albatross



Common Dolphins



Cape Barren Goose