



# Rockjumper Birding Tours

Worldwide Birding Adventures

## Western Pacific Odyssey Trip Report

*30<sup>th</sup> March – 29<sup>th</sup> April 2010*



### Trip log

*March 30, 2010*

**Tauranga and out to sea**

By mid afternoon, the intrepid passengers of the 2010000WPO 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 were 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 introductory briefing to the ship and staff, along with the safety briefing. Then it was time for the checklist session 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 (both 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 eased closer 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 Mokohinaus. 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 Chris gave 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.



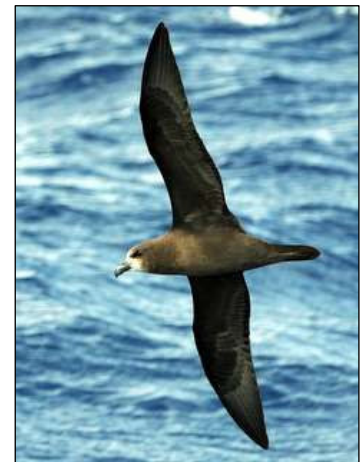
We spent the night off the western side of Norfolk Island which gave us some respite from the relatively large swell that was running from the southeast. The wind died down giving cause for hope that we might make a landing tomorrow.

### **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. These lush 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 was undergoing the worst drought in living memory and these 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 obtained a decent scope view of this species. Other birds seen by most included 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 scenic overview, 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 – the much anticipated 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 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 Sperm Whales 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, New Caledonia**

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 into 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 early, we 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 much, 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! Nearby 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 stunning 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. 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 here we met our local guide, Jean-Marc who opened the gate to the park early for us. 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 on New Caledonia 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 on 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 was 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 Goshawk perched near the road. The bus driver was persuaded to pull over and we piled out. There it was—our 17th 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 west 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 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 great looks at 5 different individuals, including 3 before breakfast, which included pale, intermediate, and dark morphs. 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; but 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 were seen.

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 boobies 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 was also seen.

After breakfast things got decidedly quiet and hot, the birding slowed right down to a “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.

***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 in the ship’s air-conditioning 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 hours 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.

After a warm welcome including a formidable Haka-like dance from the local Polynesian villagers, we 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! The bizarre Bare-eyed White-eye was 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 risen, so we set about searching for some of the other target birds of the Solomon Islands. Foremost of these is the Silver-capped Fruit-Dove, and we had many sightings of this stunning columbid. The much larger Pacific Imperial Pigeon was also encountered and we all ended up with good looks at several of these. The nomadic 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 Pygmy 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 most of us eventually succeeded. 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 (here an all-black form) fed on the forest trail and remarkably 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 which would seem to deserve full species status), Cardinal Myzomela and a Melanesian Flycatcher. Overhead were Osprey and Brahminy Kite and a confusing assortment of *Collocalia* swiftlets; we felt confident we had identified Glossy and Uniform, but there were some other puzzling individuals, at least some of which may have been White-rumped.

Passing through the village, we were met by friendly people offering very refreshing coconut milk. We continued on down to the beach where most of the locals had gathered, some of them selling their beautiful wood carvings. Many of us opted for a swim or a snorkel over the reef. 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 almost outshone that of the rainforest we had spent the morning in!



The time had come to return to the ship, so leaving this tropical paradise behind, we sailed along the south and east coasts of Rennell and set a course to Makira Island. Frigatebirds, both Lesser and Greater, 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 very successful day, we finished it off with the birdlist, dinner, and then Chris in the lecture hall giving us a briefing for our day at Makira.

**April 11, 2010**

**Anuta/Makira Island**



At first light we come up to our anchorage off Anuta village. After breakfast we boarded the zodiacs and headed towards our intended landing at a logging road. On our way we were intercepted by some villagers who informed us they had not been able to secure 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 forest on the villager's land.

So all four zodiacs were launched and we navigated through a few reefs to land on a stretch of beach. A striking Beach Kingfisher perched on the shoreline was a great bonus. We headed inshore and the coconut grove produced the first Makira endemic – Sooty Myzomela. Other birds in the coconut plantation included 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 we achieved decent views.

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 endangered species 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 – the 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 Chesnut-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 shore, 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 villagers 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 peoples also did bommies off the bow. After lunch we set a course for Guadalcanal and sailed 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

Shearwaters. 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 ferried in the darkness to the Honiara wharf to be met by our buses for a bumpy ride up 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. Chesnutbellied 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 real specials of the site. Steel-blue Flycatcher was obliging and seen by all. Spectacular Claret-breasted Fruit Doves fed in fruiting trees. The ultra-elusive endemic Ultramarine Kingfisher was

the most wanted bird on Mt Austen and was surprisingly seen by all! The massive 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 Eagles. 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. 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 Terns. 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 on terra firma 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.

After a tough afternoon of birding 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 sailed north along the Bouganville coast. We were in relatively deep water for much of the day, not far from the coastline, but also not far from the Planet Deep Trench which goes to almost 9,000 meters! There was much excitement for this day as in the past it has been excellent for seeing Heinroth's Shearwater and has been a productive 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 Terns, Black and Brown Noddies. A Grey-backed Tern was seen 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 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 Petrels. 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 note, 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 Shearwaters 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 it rewarded with some chum scraps. A

few more confusing pale terns were seen, but we only identified 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) 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) 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 onwards 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, 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 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-eyes. 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 – Teardrop (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 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. 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 Tropicbirds 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 Sooty's 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 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 first 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 number 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, 05:00, 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 porpoises 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 over 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.

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-rode 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 also everywhere! 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 and Common Tern.



Yokohama is one of the busiest ports in the world and we passed dozens of ships and even 2 large nuclear 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.

**Photo credits:** Short-tailed Albatross & Parkinson's Black Petrel by A. Riley, Gibsons Albatross, New Zealand Storm Petrel, White-necked Petrel, Kermadec Petrel, Grey-faced Petrel by J. Graham, Norfolk Gerygone, Black Noddy & White-tailed Tropicbird by A. Riley, Goulds Petrel by J. Graham, Barred Honeyeater by A. Riley, Cloven-feathered Dove by J. Graham, Kagu, New Caledonian Flycatcher, Red-headed Parrotfinch, White Tern by J. Graham, Rennell Shrikebill, Cardinal Myzomela, Rennell Fan-tailed Gerygone, Silver-capped Fruit Dove, Moustached Treeswift, Finsch's Pygmy Parrot by A. Riley, Blyth's Hornbill & Heinroth's Shearwater by J. Graham, Yellow-eyed Cuckooshrike, Tahiti Petrel, Streaked Shearwater & Brown Booby by A. Riley, Bristle-thighed Curlew by J. Graham, Micronesian Starling, Teardrop White-eye, Oceanic Flycatcher & Matsudaira's Storm Petrel by A. Riley, Bonin Petrel & Short-tailed Shearwater by J. Graham, Laysan Albatross by A. Riley, Ancient Murrelet by J. Graham, Black-footed Albatross by A. Riley.

### **SYSTEMATIC LIST of Birds recorded:**

The taxonomy and English names used in this checklist generally follow The Clements Checklist of the Birds of the World by James Clements with revisions made where an alternative name/taxonomy is considered more appropriate.

This systematic list was compiled by Chris Collins (based on the figures agreed at the nightly logs) and includes all species recorded between departing Tauranga on 30 March and arriving in Yokohama on 27 April.

Accurately counting seabirds at sea is extremely difficult (eg as one can never be sure which birds are following or revisiting the ship), so the system outlined below was adopted with this also used for the more numerous land birds:

1-10 = actual number seen

11-100 = A

101-1,000 = B

1,001-10,000 = C

10,001-100,000 = D

Non-native introductions are shown in brackets.

## BIRDS

### Antipodean Albatross

*Diomedea antipodensis*

A single individual showing the key characteristics of this species was seen in the Hauraki Gulf on 31 March.

### Gibson's Albatross

*Diomedea gibsoni*

At least ten were seen in the Hauraki Gulf (31 March) with a further four individuals noted the following day. A number of other Wandering Albatrosses were also seen during the first three sea days of the voyage; however, these were too distant to assign to species although in all probability most would have been Gibson's Albatrosses.

### Northern Royal Albatross

*Diomedea sanfordi*

A single individual in the Hauraki Gulf on 31 March was the first WPO record of this species.

### Short-tailed Albatross

*Phoebastria albatrus*

Ten of these extremely rare albatrosses were seen over three dates (25-27 April). The first was just north of the Bonin Islands and the following day, an adult was found sitting on the sea as the ship passed to the east of Torishima Island. The Captain made a hard 180° turn to starboard and everyone enjoyed great looks as we passed within 50m of this bird. Over the rest of the day another four individuals were found; however, one of the biggest surprises of the voyage were the four birds which were seen as we cruised north from Miyake-jima towards Yokohama on the morning of 27 April.

### Laysan Albatross

*Phoebastria immutabilis*

This species can be tricky along the WPO route, yet a total of five individuals were seen, with two coming close to the ship during a late afternoon chumming session north of the Bonin Islands on 25 April. Two days later, three were recorded north of Miyake-jima and at one point it was possible to see all three species of North Pacific albatross simultaneously – a WPO first!!

### Black-footed Albatross

*Phoebastria nigripes*

The first sightings of this species were on 25 April with eleven individuals logged during a late afternoon chumming session east of the Bonin Islands. The following day a low A was recorded as the ship passed Torishima with six noted on 27 April as the ship cruised passed Miyake-jima and on to Yokohama.

### Campbell Albatross

*Thalassarche impavida*

Five were seen in the Hauraki Gulf on 31 March with a further individual the following day. The characteristic honey-coloured eyes of this species were well seen on some of the closer birds.

### White-capped Albatross

*Thalassarche steadi*

A single bird was seen shortly after leaving Tauranga on 30 March, with two seen the following day in the Hauraki Gulf.

### Buller's Albatross

*Thalassarche bulleri*

At least three individuals were seen in the Hauraki Gulf (31 March).

### Southern Giant Petrel

*Macronectes giganteus*

A new species for the WPO with at least two birds in the Hauraki Gulf on 31 March.

### Northern Giant Petrel

*Macronectes halli*

Another species not previously recorded on a WPO expedition with two seen in the Hauraki Gulf (31

March).

**Northern Fulmar***Fulmarus glacialis*

Yet another new species for the WPO with a lone individual seen north of Torishima on 26 April.

**Beck's Petrel***Pseudobulweria becki*

One of the major specialities of the voyage, with at least six individuals of this extremely poorly known species seen off New Ireland on 15 April. At one stage, a Beck's Petrel was seen flying in close association with a Wedge-tailed Shearwater and a Tahiti Petrel and it was possible to appreciate that the Beck's was significantly smaller than the Tahiti (also having a different jizz) and was closer in size to the shearwater.

**Tahiti Petrel***Pseudobulweria rostrata*

This species was seen on a regular basis from 2-10 April inclusive (close to Norfolk Island – Rennell Island) with the highest counts being the days after leaving both Norfolk Island and New Caledonia when A was logged on both occasions. Smaller numbers (an average of three birds per day) were recorded on the other days. The only other sightings of this species were around Bougainville and New Ireland (14 and 15 April) when two birds were seen on both days.

**Grey-faced Petrel***Pterodroma gouldi*

Good numbers were seen on the two sea days between the Hauraki Gulf and Norfolk Island with B logged on both 1 and 2 April. Smaller numbers were seen shortly after leaving Tauranga (30 March), in the Hauraki Gulf (31 March) and after departing Norfolk Island (3 April).

**Kermadec Petrel***Pterodroma neglecta*

A total of thirteen birds were seen with nine on the two sea days after leaving the Hauraki Gulf (1-2 April) and a further three individuals on the day north of Norfolk Island (4 April). The final sighting was three weeks later (25 April) when a single bird was seen near the Bonin Islands.

**White-necked Petrel***Pterodroma cervicalis*

Seen on a daily basis from the Hauraki Gulf (31 March) until we reached New Caledonia (5 April). The highest counts were on 1 and 2 April (the two sea days between the Hauraki Gulf and Norfolk Island) when A was logged on both days. The final sighting was of a lone individual as the ship approached New Caledonia on 5 April.

**Cook's Petrel***Pterodroma cookii*

Only seen in small numbers with two individuals in the Hauraki Gulf (31 March) and a further five sighted two days later on day 2 to Norfolk Island (2 April).

**Gould's Petrel***Pterodroma leucoptera*

Seen daily between 4-7 April (day 1 to New Caledonia – day 1 to Rennell) with the highest counts being around the southern end of New Caledonia (5-6 April) when B was logged.

**Collared Petrel***Pterodroma brevipes*

The first sighting on WPO 2010 was near a seamount which lies within Australian waters north of Norfolk Island where a "classic" dark morph bird was seen and photographed on 4 April. At the time, it was believed this might be the first photographed record of a dark bird within Australian territorial waters; however, a record from 2007 has apparently recently been submitted to the Birds Australia Records Committee. Five dark and intermediate plumage birds were then seen on 7 April (day 1 to Rennell Island), yet subsequent analysis of photos confirmed that a number of pale phase birds were also encountered during this period. It is worth noting that separating pale phase Collared Petrels from Gould's Petrels is trickier than is suggested in some of the literature and is best done from photos.

**Bonin Petrel***Pterodroma hypoleuca*

The most northerly of the Pterodromas which are regularly seen on the WPO with the first sightings being two days south of the Bonin Islands (23 April) when four were logged. Six individuals were seen the following day; however, the largest numbers were in the vicinity of the Bonin Islands with B

---

recorded on 25 April. The final sightings were the following day when two birds were noted.

**Black-winged Petrel***Pterodroma nigripennis*

Encountered on a daily basis from the Hauraki Gulf (31 March) until the day we arrived at New Caledonia (5 April) with A logged on all dates except 31 March and 5 April when only individual birds were seen.

**Fairy Prion***Pachyptila turtur*

A low A was logged in the Hauraki Gulf on 31 March with a single bird then seen the following day.

**Bulwer's Petrel***Bulweria bulweria*

A total of nine birds were seen across six widely spaced dates with the first being a couple hours after leaving Honiara on Guadalcanal (12 April). Six individuals were then seen between 16-18 April (days south of Chuuk and morning at sea prior to reach this archipelago), with the final sightings being single birds on both of the two sea days south of the Bonin Islands (23 and 24 April).

**(Parkinson's) Black Petrel***Procellaria parkinsoni*

A high A was recorded in the Hauraki Gulf (31 March) with seven birds noted over the subsequent two days.

**Streaked Shearwater***Calonectris leucomelas*

The first sightings of this species were off New Ireland on 15 April where A was logged. Only one bird (20 April: day 1 to Japan) was then seen before reaching the Bonin Islands where five were seen on 25 April. On the subsequent two days, this species was common with A on 26 April (at sea passed Torishima) and B on 27 April (at sea passed Miyake-jima).

**Flesh-footed Shearwater***Puffinus carneipes*

This species was seen on seven dates, although the sightings were widely spread across the voyage. Reasonable numbers (A) were seen in the Hauraki Gulf on 31 March, with six seen the previous evening shortly after leaving Tauranga and a lone individual on 2 April (day 2 to Norfolk Island). The only other sightings were during the latter stages of the expedition with daily sightings between 24-27 April inclusive (day south of the Bonin Islands – Yokohama) although the maximum day count was only four birds.

**Wedge-tailed Shearwater***Puffinus pacificus*

This species was the most frequently encountered on the voyage with sightings on 21 dates. The first records were a couple of days north of the Hauraki Gulf (2 April: A) and birds were then recorded on a daily basis until we reached Chuuk (18 April) with A or B recorded on the majority of dates. There was then a period of four days when the only sightings were seven individuals on 20 April (day 1 to Japan) but birds were then seen again from 23-25 April inclusive (the two days south of the Bonin Islands and around these islands). During the first half of the trip, dark phase birds predominated, yet once we crossed the Equator almost all the birds were pale.

**Buller's Shearwater***Puffinus bulleri*

Only seen in the Hauraki Gulf on 1 April when a low B was recorded and the previous evening after leaving Tauranga where A was logged.

**Sooty Shearwater***Puffinus griseus*

Five individuals were recorded in the Hauraki Gulf on 31 March with the only other definite sightings being on 22 April (day 3 to Japan) when 2 were noted and 27 April (Miyake-jima to Yokohama) where four were seen.

**Short-tailed Shearwater***Puffinus tenuirostris*

This species was observed on thirteen dates with the majority of records falling into two discrete blocks. There were daily sightings from shortly before the ship arrived in New Caledonia (5 April) until the day before Rennell Island (9 April) and birds were then seen on six of the seven days between 21-27 April inclusive. The highest counts were between Torishima and Yokohama with C (ie 1,000-10,000)

encountered on 26 April (near Torishima) and D (ie 10,000+) the following day during the journey from Miyake-jima to Yokohama. On these latter days, many of the birds were migrating northwards in flocks which sometimes included several hundred individuals.

**Fluttering Shearwater***Puffinus gavius*

Two birds were seen in the Hauraki Gulf on 31 March with A logged the previous evening shortly after leaving Tauranga.

**Little Shearwater***Puffinus assimilis*

The only sightings were close to Norfolk Island, with six individuals in the late afternoon of 2 April as the ship approached the island and three the following afternoon as we sailed on for New Caledonia. These birds are presumably of the race *assimilis* which breeds on Norfolk Island. It is interesting to note that according to Margaret Christian who wrote the field guide to the Birds of Norfolk Island, there are summer and winter breeding Little Shearwaters on the island which vary so markedly in size that they require different size leg rings!!

**Atoll (“Tropical”) Shearwater***Puffinus (bailloni) dichrous*

First encountered on the two sea days south of Rennell Island with nine individuals on 8 April and six the following day. There were then two further sightings whilst in Solomon waters with one near Makira Island on 11 April and a further bird off Kolombangara on 13 April. Birds were then seen again close to the reef entrance at Chuuk (18 April: 6; 19 April: 19) with the only other sightings being whilst passing the North Mariana Islands on 24 April where a low A was recorded. Although the Audubon’s/Little/Tropical Shearwater complex has recently been split by several authorities, it seems unlikely that the situation has been fully resolved with the name ‘Atoll shearwater’ used to describe the birds seen on this voyage, ie to differentiate them from those in the Indian Ocean. Even this is probably a simplification of the situation, as there do seem to be visual differences between some of the populations seen on the expedition.

**Heinroth’s Shearwater***Puffinus heinrothi*

An extremely poorly known species and one of the star seabirds of the WPO with ten seen a few miles offshore from Kolombangara on the morning of 13 April. Unlike all previous expeditions, none were seen off Bougainville or New Ireland despite the route being very similar to prior years.

**Wilson’s Storm-petrel***Oceanites oceanicus*

This species was seen irregularly throughout the voyage with a total of 23 birds noted across twelve dates. The first sightings was two birds in the Hauraki Gulf (31 March) with the final record being a lone individual a day south of the Bonin Islands (24 April). The typical number seen on any one day was one or two birds although eight were seen the day after leaving New Caledonia (7 April).

**New Zealand Storm-petrel***Oceanites maorianus*

Five individuals of this recently rediscovered species were seen in the Hauraki Gulf on 31 March.

**“New Caledonian Storm-petrel”**

Following the sighting of a bird resembling New Zealand Storm-petrel approximately 20 miles off the coast of New Caledonia on WPO 2008, a similar looking bird was seen in the same area on 5 April 2010. When a short article about the 2008 sighting was published in the British magazine *Birding World* (by Steve Howell and Chris Collins) reference was made to the fact that some observers felt the bird was too large for New Zealand Storm-petrel. The 2010 sighting reconfirmed this view, as the bird was seen flying in close proximity with a Wilson’s Storm-petrel and appeared to “dwarf” it (ie it appeared to have a significantly longer wingspan and body length). Although freshly fledged storm-petrels can have a greater bulk than adults, this would not explain what was seen in the field by 30+ observers or the underwing pattern which seemed too dark for New Zealand Storm-petrel.

At the time of writing (3 May), the identity of this bird remains unresolved and whilst some have suggested the bird is a juvenile New Zealand Storm-petrel (which would itself be a highly significant

record), there are a number of compelling reasons for believing this suggestion is not correct.

**White-faced Storm-petrel** *Pelagodroma marina*

Two birds were seen in the Hauraki Gulf on 31 March.

**White-bellied Storm-petrel** *Fregatta grallaria*

A single individual was well seen on 3 April as we cruised north from Norfolk Island (3 April). It is interesting to note that this species was not recorded on the first two WPO expeditions but 2010 was the second year in succession that it has been seen.

**Polynesian Storm-petrel** *Nesofregatta fuliginosa*

A single individual on 8 April (day 2 to Rennell) was the only sighting of the expedition.

**Band-rumped Storm-petrel** *Oceanodroma castro*

A single bird seen north of Torishima Island (26 April) was a new bird for the WPO.

**Leach's Storm-petrel** *Oceanodroma leucorhoa*

This species was seen on a daily basis between 22-26 April (2 sea days south of Bonin Islands – Torishima) with a total of twelve birds seen with the highest daily count being three individuals. The only other sighting was a day south of Chuuk (17 April).

**Tristram's Storm-petrel** *Oceanodroma tristrami*

The first sighting of this species was a day south of the Bonin Islands (24 April) when a single bird was logged. The following day a low B was recorded (ie 100+ individuals) as the ship cruised past the Bonin Islands but only three birds were seen on the following sea day (ie passing Torishima on 26 April). Huge numbers were, however, seen during a two hour period north of Miyake-jima (27 April) with the count being estimated at a high C (ie c10,000 individuals).

**Matsudaira's Storm-petrel** *Oceanodroma matsudairae*

This species was seen in much lower numbers than Tristram's Storm-petrel with records on five dates (21-25 April inclusive). The highest counts (a low A) were on 24 and 25 April (around the Bonin Islands and the sea day south of there) with the numbers seen on the previous three days all being in single figures.

**Common Diving-petrel** *Pelecanoides urinatrix*

Four birds were seen in the Hauraki Gulf on 31 March with five noted the previous evening as the ship departed from Tauranga.

**Red-tailed Tropicbird** *Phaethon rubricauda*

The first sighting was a day north of the Hauraki Gulf (1 April: 1), with birds then seen on the subsequent three dates including a high A (ie approximately 100 individuals) around Norfolk Island. It was then more than two weeks until the next record, a single individual on 21 April (2 days north of Chuuk), with the only other birds (three individuals) being offshore from the North Mariana Islands on 23 and 24 April.

**White-tailed Tropicbird** *Phaethon lepturus*

A total of thirty one birds were seen across eleven widely spaced dates; there were only two days when more than three birds were noted, with the highest counts being eight birds on 8 April (day 2 to Rennell Island) and four individuals around Chuuk on 19 April. The first sighting was on 4 April (day 1 to New Caledonia) with the final bird being on 23 April (day 4 to Japan).

**Australian Gannet** *Morus serrator*

Only seen in the Hauraki Gulf on 31 March where B was logged and shortly after departing Tauranga (30 March) when three were observed.

**Masked Booby** *Sula dactylatra*

This species was recorded on seven widely spread dates during the voyage with the largest numbers (A) being close to Norfolk Island (2-4 April). Small numbers were then seen during the journey from New Caledonia to Rennell with the final sighting being off the North Mariana Islands on 23 April (2 sea days

south of the Bonin Islands).

**Red-footed Booby***Sula sula*

Seen on eleven dates between 7-25 April (day 1 north of New Caledonia – Bonin Islands) although on most dates only a single figure count was recorded. The highest numbers were close to Rennell on 10 April when A was logged.

**Brown Booby***Sula leucogaster*

This species was first encountered on the first sea day after leaving Noumea, New Caledonia (when nine birds were logged) and was then seen on fourteen subsequent dates with the final birds (seven individuals) being near the Bonin Islands on 25 April. The highest count was close to Rennell on 10 April when A was logged, with all other day counts being in single figures.

**Great Cormorant***Phalacrocorax carbo*

As the ship approached Yokohama (27 April) a number of cormorants were seen with at least six being positively identified as Great Cormorants.

**Japanese Cormorant***Phalacrocorax capillatus*

At least nine birds were seen as the ship approached Yokohama on 27 April.

**Pied Cormorant***Phalacrocorax varius*

A small colony was seen as the ship pulled away from Tauranga (30 March) with two seen the following day on the Maori Rocks in the Hauraki Gulf.

**Little Pied Cormorant***Phalacrocorax melanoleucos*

This species was seen on three widely spread dates during the first half of the expedition. A single individual was seen shortly after leaving the wharf at Tauranga (30 March), three were then seen on New Caledonia (6 April), with the final record being on the river at Mount Austin, Guadalcanal (12 April) where this species is seemingly only a vagrant.

**Great Frigatebird***Fregata minor*

Although many of the more distant frigatebirds seen during the voyage were not identified to species, there were confirmed sightings of Great Frigatebird on five dates with the first records (two birds) over Norfolk Island on 3 April and the final individual being off New Ireland on 15 April. The highest concentrations were around Rennell Island where A was logged on 10 April.

**Lesser Frigatebird***Fregata ariel*

All sightings of this species were during the middle third of the trip with the first confirmed sighting being a single bird on the sea day south of Rennell Island. Over the next week, Lesser Frigatebirds were seen on five days (ie through the Solomon Islands to a day north of New Ireland) with the highest count being around Rennell Island on 10 April when A was logged.

**Grey Heron***Ardea cinerea*

Three birds were seen as the ship approached cruised into the Yokohama/Tokyo Bay on 27 April.

**Great Egret***Ardea alba*

The only sighting of the expedition was a lone bird shortly after the ship left the wharf at Tauranga on 30 March.

**White-faced Heron***Egretta novaehollandiae*

Only recorded on Norfolk Island where three were seen on 3 April.

**Pacific Reef Heron***Egretta sacra*

Seen on five dates with one bird on New Caledonia (6 April), two on Makira on 11 April and then single birds on Kolombangara (13 April) and on both days on Chuuk (18 and 19 April).

**Rufous Night-Heron***Nycticorax caledonicus*

This species was only recorded on Chuuk with four seen from the ship in the early evening of 18 April as we awaited clearance from Immigration and Customs.

**Yellow Bittern***Ixobrychus sinensis*

A single individual was recorded on Tol South (19 April).

**Australian Ibis** *Threskiornis molucca*

This species was only recorded on Rennell with a bird logged on 10 April.

**Pacific Black Duck** *Anas superciliosa*

Two were seen on Kolombangara on 13 April with single bird then noted on Chuuk on 19 April.

**Osprey** *Pandion haliaetus*

This species was seen on three of the islands visited in the Solomons with two on Rennell (10 April), six on Makira (11 April) and five on Kolombangara (13 April). The only other records were three birds on New Caledonia on 6 April.

**Pacific Baza** *Aviceda subcristata*

Three birds were noted at Mount Austin, Guadalcanal on 12 April, with at least six then seen the following day during the shore excursion on Kolombangara.

**Black(-eared) Kite** *Milvus migrans*

The only sightings on the voyage were of three birds as the ship cruised through the Yokohama/Tokyo Bay on 27 April.

**Whistling Kite** *Haliastur sphenurus*

This species was only seen during the shore excursion to Riviere Bleue on New Caledonia with five logged on 6 April.

**Brahminy Kite** *Haliastur Indus*

This species was seen on all of the four landings in the Solomons with a total of thirteen individuals logged. Single individuals were also seen on both days on New Caledonia (5-6 April).

**Solomon Islands Sea-Eagle** *Haliaeetus sanfordi*

This spectacular Solomon Islands endemic was seen on three of the landings in the Solomons with a single individual on Makira (11 April), three the following day at Mount Austin on Guadalcanal with the final sightings being two birds during the shore excursion on Kolombangara (13 April).

**Swamp Harrier** *Circus approximans*

The only record was of a single bird on Norfolk Island on 3 April.

**Variable Goshawk** *Accipiter hiogaster*

Two were seen on Guadalcanal on 12 April with a single bird the following day on Kolombangara.

**Brown Goshawk** *Accipiter fasciatus*

Four on Rennell on 10 April.

**Pied Goshawk** *Accipiter albogularis*

The only sightings were on Makira on 11 April where two were seen.

**New Caledonia Goshawk** *Accipiter haplochrous*

A single individual of this New Caledonian endemic was well seen a short distance from the entrance to Riviere Bleue (6 April).

**Australian Kestrel** *Falco cenchroides*

A total of four individuals were seen during the shore excursion on Norfolk Island (3 April).

[**California Quail** *Callipepla californica*]

A common introduction on Norfolk Island where A was logged on 3 April.

[**Red Junglefowl** *Gallus gallus*]

Another well established introduced species on Norfolk Island with A recorded (3 April).

**Roviana Rail** *Gallirallus rovianae*

This species which was only described in the early 1990s proved to be trickier than usual with the only sighting being a lone individual which was seen by some of the group during the shore excursion on Kolombangara on 13 April.

**Purple Swamphen** *Porphyrio porphyrio*

Two individuals were seen on Norfolk Island (3 April) with the only other sightings being on Kolombangara where three were recorded on 13 April.

**Kagu** *Rhynochetos jubatus*

One of the key ‘landbirds’ of the voyage with at least five of these extraordinary birds seen at Riviere Bleue, New Caledonia on 6 April.

**South Island Pied Oystercatcher** *Haematopus finschi*

A large flock of over 100 birds (B) was seen on the wharf at Tauranga on 30 March.

**Variable Oystercatcher** *Haematopus unicolor*

Approximately seventy individuals were seen on the wharf as the ship sailed from Tauranga on 30 March.

**Pacific Golden Plover** *Pluvialis fulva*

The only sighting of the voyage was a single bird on Chuuk on 19 April.

**Whimbrel** *Numenius phaeopus*

Seen on four widely spaced dates with a lone bird on Norfolk Island (3 April), three on New Caledonia (6 April), the same number on Chuuk (18 April) and a final bird at sea north of Torishima (26 April).

**Bristle-thighed Curlew** *Numenius tahitiensis*

One of the most extraordinary at sea records on any of the four WPO expeditions was a single Bristle-thighed Curlew which was seen well and photographed as it flew passed the ship on the morning of 18 April. The bird circled the vessel for several minutes and then continued north. At the time, the ship was approximately fifty miles south of Chuuk with the position being 06 26N 152 14E.

**Common Sandpiper** *Actitis hypoleucos*

A single bird was seen on Chuuk on 19 April.

**Wandering Tattler** *Heterosceles incanus*

Four on Norfolk Island on 3 April with single birds then seen on both days on Chuuk (18-19 April).

**Ruddy Turnstone** *Arenaria interpres*

Seen on the same islands as the previous species, with eight on Norfolk Island and two on the first day on Chuuk (18 April) and four the following day.

**Red-necked Phalarope** *Phalaropus lobatus*

Approximately fifty birds were seen off New Ireland whilst chumming for Beck’s Petrel on 15 April with the only other sightings being on the sea day near Torishima where a low A was logged.

**Grey Phalarope** *Phalaropus fulicarius*

Only seen at the very end of the voyage, with two birds on the sea day off Torishima (26 April) and three the following day between Miyake-jima and Yokohama.

**South Polar Skua** *Stercorarius maccormicki*

Three of these long distant migrants were seen during the latter stages of the voyage with the first individual a day south of the Bonin Islands (24 April). Single birds were then seen on 26 and 27 April (Torishima and Miyake-jima to Yokohama).

**Pomarine Skua** *Stercorarius pomarinus*

The most frequently encountered Skua species with a total of twenty eight birds seen across fifteen dates. The first individual was on the first sea day after leaving New Caledonia (7 April) and the last a few hours before arriving at Yokohama. The highest count was a day south of Rennell (9 April) when five were logged. On the majority of other dates when this species was recorded, only one or two individuals were seen. During the latter stages of the expedition, ‘Poms’ were seen “knocking down” both a Bonin Petrel and a Streaked Shearwater, presumably to feed on the birds themselves rather than making them regurgitate what they had eaten.

**Arctic Skua** *Stercorarius parasiticus*

This species was only encountered during the second half of the voyage with a total of four birds seen.

The first sighting was a day south of Chuuk with the other three individuals between 23-27 April (2 days south of the Bonin Island – Yokohama).

**Long-tailed Skua** *Stercorarius longicaudus*

A total of thirteen Long-tailed Skuas were recorded across eight dates. Only one individual was seen during the first half of the expedition (2 April: a day south of Norfolk Island) with the final sightings (two birds) being between Miyake-jima and Yokohama on 27 April.

**Kelp Gull** *Larus dominicanus*

The only records of the species were as the ship left the wharf at Tauranga on 30 March.

**Black-tailed Gull** *Larus crassirostris*

Five individuals were seen as the ship passed Miyake-jima and headed for Yokohama on 27 April.

**Silver Gull** *Larus novaehollandiae*

This species was reasonably numerous (A) around the harbour in Noumea, New Caledonia on both 5 and 6 April.

**Red-billed Gull** *Larus scopulinus*

This New Zealand endemic was seen as the ship departed Tauranga on 30 March (where A was logged), with B recorded the following day in the Hauraki Gulf.

**Vega Gull** *Larus vegae*

This species was reasonably numerous as the ship cruised through the Yokohama/Tokyo Bay on 27 April with A logged.

**Slaty-backed Gull** *Larus schistisagus*

Only seen at the very end of the expedition with three birds seen in the Yokohama/Tokyo Bay on 27 April.

**Caspian Tern** *Sterna caspia*

Two individuals were recorded shortly after the ship left Tauranga on 30 March.

**Great Crested Tern** *Sterna bergi*

This species was seen close to the majority of islands between New Caledonia and Chuuk with a total of thirty seven individuals logged across nine dates.

**Black-naped Tern** *Sterna sumatrana*

The first sighting of this species was on Rennell (10 April) where five were recorded, with three off Kolombangara on 13 April. The only others were around Chuuk where a low A was logged on 18 April and three were seen the following day.

**White-fronted Tern** *Sterna striata*

Five birds were seen as the ship left Tauranga on 30 March.

**Common Tern** *Sterna hirundo*

This species was only recorded on two days, with three off New Ireland on 15 April and a single bird shortly before reaching Yokohama on 27 April.

**Fairy Tern** *Sterna nereis*

The only sighting was a single individual close to Noumea, New Caledonia on 5 April.

**Grey-backed Tern** *Sterna lunata*

This species rarely approaches ships and the only confirmed sightings were five off Kolombangara on 13 April, with a further three individuals off Bougainville the following day.

**Bridled Tern** *Sterna anaethetus*

This species was encountered far less frequently than Sooty Tern with sightings on only four dates. The highest count was as the ship cruised to Kolombangara on the morning of 13 April when a low A was logged with two seen the previous day off Guadalcanal. The only other sightings were on day 2 to Rennell (8 April: 2) and off New Ireland (15 April: 2).

**Sooty Tern** *Sterna fuscata*

One of the most frequently encountered seabirds on the voyage with sightings on twenty dates. This species was recorded on a more-or-less daily basis from a day south of Norfolk Island (2 April: 1) until the Bonin Islands (25 April: 1) with either A or B recorded on twelve days and single figure counts on the other dates.

**Black Noddy** *Anous minutus*

This Noddy was encountered on an irregular basis from a day south of Norfolk Island (2 April) until two days south of the Bonin Islands with sightings on eleven widely scattered dates. The highest counts were around Norfolk Island and Chuuk (islands where this species breeds) with B logged at both locations (3 and 19 April).

**Brown Noddy** *Anous stolidus*

This species was first seen around Norfolk Island on 3 April and last recorded off the Bonin Islands on 25 April. Sightings were spread across fourteen dates with the highest number around Chuuk where B was logged on 19 April.

**Grey Ternlet** *Procelsterna albivitta*

This species breeds in the Hauraki Gulf and on islets just offshore from Norfolk Island and was seen on a daily basis between these two locations (31 March-3 April). The highest count was around the Maori Rocks in the Hauraki Gulf where A was logged, with a total of fourteen birds seen over the subsequent three days.

**White Tern** *Gygis alba*

Sightings of this species were divided into two discrete blocks with birds seen around Norfolk Island and the days either side of visiting that island (2-4 April) and then on a daily basis from 18-24 April (Chuuk – day south of the Bonin Islands). The highest counts were at Norfolk Island and on Chuuk with B logged at both locations.

**Ancient Murrelet** *Synthliboramphus antiquus*

A new bird for the WPO with at least twenty seen in the Yokohama/Tokyo Bay on the morning of 27 April.

**Japanese Murrelet** *Synthliboramphus wumizusume*

Another of the major seabird specialities of the voyage and the WPO ended on a high with at least seventy five of these threatened alcids seen as the ship passed west of Miyake-jima on the morning of 27 April.

**Rhinoceros Auklet** *Cerorhinca monocerata*

Another new species for the WPO with twenty four logged in the Yokohama/Tokyo Bay (27 April). This species was the final highlight of a spectacular morning which included three species of alcids, all three North Pacific Albatrosses and thousands of Tristram's Storm-petrels.

**Metallic Pigeon** *Columba vitiensis*

A low A was logged during the excursion to Mount Koghi, New Caledonia on the afternoon of 5 April.

**[Spotted Dove** *Streptopelia chinensis]*

This Asian introduction was seen on New Caledonia on both days with a low A recorded on 5 April.

**Mackinlay's Cuckoo-dove** *Macropygia mackinlayi*

This species was uncharacteristically inconspicuous compared with previous visits to the Solomons and was only seen on Rennell (10 April: 6) and at Mount Austin, Guadalcanal (12 April: 2).

**Emerald Dove** *Chalcophaps indica*

Three birds were seen in the Botanical Gardens on Norfolk Island on 3 April with the only other sighting being a single bird at Riviere Bleue, New Caledonia on 6 April.

**Stephan's Dove** *Chalcophaps stephani*

A new species for the WPO list with a single bird seen at Mount Austin (12 April).

**Caroline Islands Ground-dove** *Gallicolumba kubaryi*

This species is endemic to the Caroline Islands and was seen on the excursion to Tol South and by those who explored Japanese Gun on Chuuk (4 April) with a total of four individuals recorded.

**Bronze Ground-dove** *Gallicolumba beccarii*

A single bird was seen on the excursion to Mount Austin on 12 April.

**Superb Fruit-dove** *Ptilinopus superbus*

Two birds were seen at Mount Austin, Guadalcanal (12 April) with a single individual recorded the following day on Kolombangara.

**Crimson-crowned Fruit-dove** *Ptilinopus porphyraceus*

Reasonably numerous on Chuuk with A logged on 4 April and a few seen from the ship as we awaited clearance on the late afternoon of the previous day.

**Silver-capped Fruit-dove** *Ptilinopus richardsii*

This species is endemic to Rennell and a few nearby islets; however, it is fairly common with A recorded on 10 April.

**Claret-breasted Fruit-Dove** *Ptilinopus viridis*

Another range-restricted fruit-dove which was seen on Guadalcanal (7 birds) on 12 April and Kolombangara (2 birds) on 13 April.

**Cloven-feathered Dove** *Drepanoptila holosericea*

This New Caledonian endemic can be tricky to find. Nonetheless, two were seen on the afternoon excursion to Mount Koghi on 5 April, with two others seen the following day at Riviere Bleue National Park.

**Pacific Imperial-pigeon** *Ducula pacifica*

This species was only seen on Rennell (10 April) with a low A logged.

**Red-knobbed Imperial-pigeon** *Ducula rubricera*

This impressive looking pigeon was seen on Makira, Guadalcanal and Kolombangara (11-13 April) with two birds on each of the first two islands and a low A logged on Kolombangara.

**Chestnut-bellied Imperial-pigeon** *Ducula brenchleyi*

This poorly-known species is endemic to just three islands in the Solomons (plus a few islets) with three birds seen during the shore excursion on Makira on 11 April.

**New Caledonian Imperial-pigeon** *Ducula goliath*

A single individual was well seen at Riviere Bleue on 6 April.

**Ducorps' Cockatoo** *Cacatua ducorpsii*

This species was seen at Mount Austin, Guadalcanal on 12 April where a low A was logged, with a single bird recorded the following day on Kolombangara.

**Cardinal Lory** *Chalcopsitta cardinalis*

This brilliantly coloured parrot was seen on Guadalcanal (12 April: 3) and Kolombangara (13 April: A).

**Rainbow Lorikeet** *Trichoglossus haematodus*

This species was common in downtown Noumea, New Caledonia (6 April) and was also seen on Makira and Guadalcanal (A on all dates).

**Yellow-bibbed Lory** *Lorius chlorocercus*

A Solomon Islands endemic which was seen on both Rennell and Guadalcanal (10 and 12 April) with A logged at Mount Austin and just a single bird on Rennell.

**Duchess Lorikeet** *Charmosyna margarethae*

Two of these parrots were seen on Kolombangara on 13 April.

**Finsch's Pygmy-parrot** *Micropsitta finschii*

Although this species is reasonably numerous in the Solomons, its tiny size can make it difficult to spot; however, it was seen on three of the islands we visited in the archipelago with the highest count being on Rennell where a low A was recorded (10 April).

**Horned Parakeet***Eunymphicus cornutus*

This New Caledonia endemic can be tricky to find at Riviere Bleue. Nevertheless, three birds were seen during the excursion there on 6 April. Three individuals were also seen at Mount Koghi the previous afternoon.

**New Caledonian Parakeet***Cyanoramphus saissetti*

Another species which is not found on every WPO but four were well seen during the visit to Riviere Bleue, New Caledonia on 6 April.

**Norfolk Island Parakeet***Cyanoramphus cookii*

Three individuals were seen during the visit to the Botanical Gardens on Norfolk Island (3 April).

**[Crimson Rosella***Platycercus elegans]*

A reasonably common introduced species on Norfolk Island with a low A logged on 3 April.

**Singing Parrot***Geoffroyus heteroclitus*

Seen in small numbers (1-4 birds) on Rennell, Guadalcanal and Kolombangara (10, 12, 13 April).

**Eclectus Parrot***Eclectus roratus*

Another stunningly beautiful bird which was recorded on Makira, Guadalcanal and Kolombangara (11-13 April) with the highest count being on Kolombangara where a low A was logged.

**Shining Bronze-cuckoo***Chrysococcyx lucidus*

A single bird was seen on Rennell on 10 April was the only record for the expedition.

**Buff-headed Coucal***Centropus milo*

This raucous Coucal, which is endemic to the Solomon Islands, makes an almost mammalian-like call and was seen at Mount Austin, Guadalcanal on 12 April with three logged during the morning excursion. The following afternoon six were seen on Kolombangara.

**Glossy Swiftlet***Collocalia esculenta*

This species was seen in reasonable numbers on the two days ashore on New Caledonia (5-6 April) and then on all the islands visited in the Solomons with A generally logged.

**White-rumped Swiftlet***Aerodramus spodiopygius*

Reasonably numerous on Kolombangara (13 April) with A recorded.

**Uniform Swiftlet***Aerodramus vanikorensis*

Seen on all the islands visited in the Solomon with the highest count being on Rennell where A was logged.

**Caroline Islands Swiftlet***Aerodramus inquietus*

This extremely common swiftlet is endemic to the Caroline Islands and was seen on Chuuk on both 18 and 19 April.

**Moustached Treeswift***Hemiprocne mystacea*

This spectacular bird was seen on Rennell (10 April: 2), Guadalcanal (12 April: 2) and Kolombangara (13 April: 4).

**Common Kingfisher***Alcedo atthis*

Two birds of the race salomonensis were seen on Kolombangara on 13 April with a single sighting the previous day on Guadalcanal. These birds differ markedly from the birds in Europe having blue ear-coverts and richer purple-blue upperparts.

**Ultramarine Kingfisher***Todirhamphus leucopygius*

Undoubtedly the best views of any WPO expedition with the entire group getting excellent looks at a pair of this tricky Solomon Islands endemic at Mount Austin, Guadalcanal on 12 April.

**Collared Kingfisher***Todirhamphus chloris*

Seen on all islands visited in the Solomons: Rennell (10 April: 3), Makira (11 April: 2), Guadalcanal (12 April: 1) and Kolombangara (13 April: 3).

**Beach Kingfisher***Todirhamphus saurophaga*

A single bird was seen on Makira on 11 April.

**Sacred Kingfisher** *Todirhamphus sanctus*

A low A was logged during the shore excursion on Norfolk Island (3 April) with a total of three birds also seen on New Caledonia (5-6 April). The only other sighting was on Rennell where two were recorded on 10 April.

**Dollarbird** *Eurystomus orientalis*

Only seen in the Solomons with two on Makira (11 April) and three at Mount Austin on Guadalcanal (12 April).

**Blyth's Hornbill** *Aceros plicatus*

At least six of these spectacular birds were seen at Mount Austin, Guadalcanal on 12 April although getting good views was often quite challenging given the tight forest canopy. A further two individuals were then seen the following day on Kolombangara.

**Pacific Swallow** *Hirundo tahitica*

Seen on four dates with a single bird on New Caledonia (6 April) and then on Makira (11 April: A) and Guadalcanal (12 April: 2). The final sightings were on Chuuk on 18 April where two were recorded on 18 April.

**Welcome Swallow** *Hirundo neoxena*

A single bird was seen at sea south of Norfolk Island on the afternoon of 2 April with A logged ashore on the island the following day.

**Melanesian Cuckoo-shrike** *Coracina caledonica*

Two individuals were seen at Riviere Bleue, New Caledonia on 6 April with a single bird the previous afternoon during the excursion to Mount Koghi. The only other sighting was of a lone bird on Kolombangara (13 April).

**Yellow-eyed Cuckoo-shrike** *Coracina lineate*

This cuckoo-shrike was the most frequently encountered during our shore excursions in the Solomon Islands and was seen on all the islands which were visited. A was logged on Rennell and Kolombangara (10 and 13 April), with 3 birds seen on Makira (11 April) and two on Guadalcanal (12 April).

**White-bellied Cuckoo-shrike** *Coracina papuensis*

As with the above species, this cuckoo-shrike was only seen in the Solomons with six birds at Mount Austin, Guadalcanal on 12 April and eight logged the following day on Kolombangara.

**New Caledonian Cuckoo-shrike** *Coracina analis*

This New Caledonian endemic was seen at Riviere Bleue on 6 April with three birds found.

**Cicadabird** *Coracina tenuirostris*

Only recorded on Guadalcanal (12 April) where two individuals were seen at Mount Austin.

**Solomon Islands Cuckoo-shrike** *Coracina holopolia*

As its name suggests, this species is endemic to the Solomon Islands. It was only seen during the shore excursion to Mount Austin on Guadalcanal (12 April) where three birds were found.

**Long-tailed Triller** *Lalage leucopyga*

Three individuals were seen at Riviere Bleue, New Caledonia on 6 April with a single bird also logged on Makira (11 April).

**[Red-vented Bulbul** *Pycnonotus cafer]*

Two individuals of this Asian introduction were seen around Noumea, New Caledonia on 5 April.

**[Blackbird** *Turdus merula]*

A reasonably common introduced species on Norfolk Island where A was logged on 3 April.

**Island Thrush** *Turdus poliocephalus*

The only island on the WPO itinerary where this highly variable species can be found is Rennell where the birds resemble 'mini Blackbirds'. During our shore excursion on 10 April, at least two individuals

were seen along the forest road north of the landing site.

**[Song Thrush** *Turdus philomelos*]

This species was introduced onto Norfolk Island and two were seen there during the shore excursion on 3 April.

**Caroline Reed Warbler** *Acrocephalus syrinx*

This species is endemic to the Caroline Islands and was seen in reasonable numbers on both Weno and Tol South, Chuuk on 19 April.

**Willie-wagtail** *Rhipidura leucophrys*

Seen on both Makira (11 April: 6) and Kolombangara (13 April: 2).

**White-winged Fantail** *Rhipidura cockerelli*

A Solomon Islands endemic which was recorded at Mount Austin, Guadalcanal on 12 April where three birds were seen.

**Rennell Fantail** *Rhipidura rennelliana*

Endemic to Rennell, this species was seen well with a low A logged during the shore excursion on 10 April.

**Grey Fantail** *Rhipidura fuliginosa*

This species was seen on Norfolk Island (3 April: A) and on both days ashore on New Caledonia (Mount Koghi: 4; Riviere Bleue: 6).

**Streaked Fantail** *Rhipidura spilodera*

This New Caledonian endemic was seen at both Mount Koghi (5 April: 2) and Riviere Bleue (6 April: A).

**Rufous Fantail** *Rhipidura rufifrons*

This species was only found on Makira where three were seen on 11 April.

**Southern Shrikebill** *Clytorhynchus pachycephaloides*

Two individuals of this regional endemic (which is only found on New Caledonia and Vanuatu) were seen at Mount Koghi on 5 April, with a similar number seen the following day at Riviere Bleue National Park.

**Rennell Shrikebill** *Clytorhynchus hamlini*

This Rennell endemic is common (low A) and was seen well during our shore excursion on 10 April.

**Chuuk Monarch** *Metabolus rugensis*

Two males and one female of this highly range-restricted and endangered species were seen on Tol South, Chuuk on 18 April.

**Chestnut-bellied Monarch** *Monarcha castaneiventris*

A Solomon Islands endemic which was seen on both Makira (11 April: 8) and at Mount Austin, Guadalcanal (12 April: 2).

**White-capped Monarch** *Monarcha richardsii*

This monarch is only found in the New Georgia group of islands (including Kolombangara) and four individuals were seen on 13 April during our afternoon shore excursion.

**Oceanic Flycatcher** *Myiagra oceanica*

This Micronesian endemic is relatively common on Chuuk and A was logged on Weno and Tol South on 19 April.

**Steel-blue Flycatcher** *Myiagra ferrocyanea*

This Solomon Islands endemic was seen on Guadalcanal (12 April: 3) and on Kolombangara (13 April: 4).

**Ochre-headed (Makira) Flycatcher** *Myiagra cervinicauda*

This species is endemic to Makira and four individuals were seen during the shore excursion on 11 April.

**Melanesian (New Caledonian) Flycatcher** *Myiagra caledonica*

This species was seen at both Mount Koghi (5 April: 1) and Riviere Bleue, New Caledonia (6 April: 2). It is also found on Rennell and during the shore excursion there, a single bird was seen on 10 April.

**Pacific Robin***Petroica multicolor*

Five of these brightly coloured birds were seen on Norfolk Island on 3 April.

**Yellow-bellied Robin***Eopsaltria flaviventris*

This New Caledonian endemic was recorded at both Mount Koghi (5 April: 1) and Riviere Bleue, New Caledonia (6 April: 6).

**Golden Whistler***Pachycephala pectoralis*

At least six individuals of the highly distinctive (and very drab) subspecies of this bird were seen in the Botanical Gardens on Norfolk Island on 3 April. The only other island where this species was seen during the voyage was Makira (11 April: 2) where the males are more typical having a vivid black and yellow plumage.

**New Caledonian Whistler***Pachycephala caledonica*

This endemic is generally found in more forested areas than the next species (ie Rufous Whistler) and a low A was logged following the visit to Riviere Bleue, New Caledonia on 6 April. Two birds were also seen the previous day at Mount Koghi.

**Rufous Whistler***Pachycephala rufiventris*

The only records were during the shore excursion to Riviere Bleue, New Caledonia where two individuals were seen on 6 April.

**Norfolk Gerygone***Gerygone modesta*

This endemic is reasonably common in the Botanical Gardens on Norfolk Island with a low A logged on 3 April.

**Fan-tailed Gerygone***Gerygone flavolateralis*

Seen in reasonable numbers on both days on New Caledonia with five at Mount Koghi on the afternoon of 5 April and a low A during the excursion to Riviere Bleue the following day.

**Rennell (Fan-tailed) Gerygone***Gerygone (flavolateralis) citrina*

A reasonably numerous bird on Rennell with A logged during the shore excursion on 10 April. Although this bird is generally lumped with the Gerygones on New Caledonia (and not treated as a sixth Rennell endemic), visually it is quite different, eg pale eyes and a mainly yellow breast compared with the birds on New Caledonia which have dark eyes and less yellow on the underparts. During playback experiments on Rennell in 2008, it was also noted that the Rennell birds did not respond to recordings from New Caledonia, providing further evidence that this population should potentially be considered as a separate species.

**Olive-backed Sunbird***Cinnyris jugularis*

Only seen in the Solomon Islands with six at Mount Austin, Guadalcanal on 12 April and a similar number on Kolombangara the following day.

**Midget Flowerpecker***Dicaeum aeneum*

This Solomon Islands endemic is not uncommon at Mount Austin on Guadalcanal and A was recorded on 12 April, although its tiny size meant getting good views was often challenging.

**Mottled Flowerpecker***Dicaeum tristrami*

Only a single individual of this Makira Island endemic was seen on the shore excursion on 11 April.

**Caroline Islands White-eye***Zosterops semperi*

This Micronesian endemic is reasonably numerous on Chuuk and A was logged on 19 April.

**Rennell White-eye***Zosterops rennellianus*

Endemic to Rennell and not uncommon with A seen on 10 April.

**Solomon Islands White-eye***Zosterops rendovae*

This slightly confusingly named White-eye is only found on the New Georgia group of islands (including Kolombangara) within the Solomon archipelago. During our shore excursion, it was less numerous than some of the other White-eye species on the voyage with only a single bird seen (13 April).

**Green-backed White-eye** *Zosterops xanthochrous*

This New Caledonian endemic is reasonably common and A was logged on both days ashore (5-6 April).

**Slender-billed White-eye** *Zosterops tenuirostris*

This Norfolk Island endemic was well seen in the Botanical Gardens with a low A logged on 3 April.

**Silver-eye** *Zosterops lateralis*

This species was only seen on Norfolk Island (3 April: 4) and at Mount Koghi, New Caledonia (5 April: 2).

**Faichuuk (Great Truk) White-eye** *Rukia ruki*

This species is only found on a few of the islands within the Chuuk lagoon and is treated as critically endangered by Birdlife International. After a long zodiac ride and a tough climb, one bird was seen well on Tol South on 19 April.

**Bare-eyed White-eye** *Woodfordia superciliosa*

This species is probably the commonest of the single-island endemics on Rennell and good numbers (A) were seen during the shore excursion on 10 April.

**Dark-brown Honeyeater** *Lichmera incana*

This species was seen in good numbers at Mount Koghi (A) on 5 April, with a further four individuals seen the following day at Riviere Bleue.

**New Caledonia Myzomela** *Myzomela caledonica*

The first of six species of Myzomela recorded on the voyage with six seen at Mount Koghi (5 April) and four at Riviere Bleue.

**Micronesian Myzomela** *Myzomela rubratra*

This species is common on Chuuk and A was logged on 19 April with a few birds also seen from the ship in the late afternoon of 18 April as we awaited clearance.

**Cardinal Myzomela** *Myzomela cardinalis*

This species was seen on both Rennell, where eight were recorded (10 April), and Makira where two individuals were noted (11 April).

**Yellow-vented Myzomela** *Myzomela eichhorni*

A relatively scarce Solomon Island endemic with four birds seen on Kolombangara on 13 April.

**Black-headed Myzomela** *Myzomela melanocephala*

Endemic to some of the islands in the Central Solomons, two individuals were seen at Mount Austin, Guadalcanal on 12 April.

**Sooty Myzomela** *Myzomela tristrami*

Restricted to Makira and a few nearby islands, this species was reasonably numerous (A) during our shore landing on 11 April.

**New Caledonian Friarbird** *Philemon diemenensis*

This endemic was seen on both excursions on New Caledonia (5-6 April) with three at Mount Koghi and a low A logged the following day at Riviere Bleue.

**San Cristobal Melidectes** *Melidectes sclateri*

This bizarre-looking honeyeater is restricted to Makira with five recorded during the shore excursion on 11 April.

**Crow Honeyeater** *Gymnomyza aubryana*

This species is usually one of the toughest New Caledonian endemics to find at Riviere Bleue. We were

therefore extremely fortunate to find a flowering tree with three birds seen well by the entire group.

**Barred Honeyeater** *Phylidonyris undulata*

This endemic is not uncommon in suitable habitat on New Caledonia with six at Mount Koghi (5 April) and a low A the following day at Riviere Bleue.

**White-breasted Woodswallow** *Artamus leucorhynchus*

This species is generally only encountered in more ‘open country’ habitats on New Caledonia, with single birds seen on both days ashore (5-6 April).

**New Caledonia Crow** *Corvus moneduloides*

This New Caledonian endemic is one of the few birds known to use tools (sticks in the case of this species). It can be difficult to locate at Riviere Bleue; however, two were found shortly after arriving at the forest at Riviere Bleue on 6 April.

**White-billed (Guadalcanal) Crow** *Corvus woodfordi*

This is another corvid which can be extremely elusive and we were extremely fortunate to find three birds at Mount Austin on 12 April.

**Metallic Starling** *Aplonis metallica*

Seen on both Guadalcanal (12 April: 5) and Kolombangara (13 April: A).

**Singing Starling** *Aplonis cantoroides*

This species was only recorded on Kolombangara (13 April) with A logged.

**Rennell Starling** *Aplonis insularis*

This Rennell endemic seems to be somewhat nomadic as the numbers seen vary from year to year. Four birds were found during the shore excursion on 10 April.

**Brown-winged Starling** *Aplonis grandis*

This Solomon Islands endemic species is reasonably reliable at Mount Austin, Guadalcanal with a low A logged on 12 April. Despite its name, the diagnostic pale brown primaries can, on occasions, be moderately difficult to see when birds are perched.

**San Cristobal Starling** *Aplonis dichroa*

This Makira Island endemic proved to be moderately tough to find with only three birds seen during the shore excursion on 11 April.

**Striated Starling** *Aplonis striata*

A New Caledonian endemic which was only seen at Mount Koghi with nine individuals recorded.

**Micronesian Starling** *Aplonis opaca*

A common bird on Chuuk with A recorded on 4 April with a further four individuals seen from the ship the previous afternoon as we waited for the ship to be cleared into Micronesia.

**Yellow-faced Myna** *Mino dumontii*

This distinctive Myna was seen in reasonable numbers (A) at Mount Austin, Guadalcanal (12 April) with a further four birds recorded the following day on Kolombangara.

**[Common Myna** *Acridotheres tristis]*

This Asian introduction was reasonably numerous on New Caledonia (5-6 April) and was also seen in Honiara, Guadalcanal (12 April) where six individuals were recorded.

**[European Starling** *Sturnus vulgaris]*

This introduced species is common on Norfolk Island (3 April: A) with two birds also seen on New Caledonia on 5 April.

**[House Sparrow** *Passer domesticus]*

Another introduction which was seen on both Norfolk Island and New Caledonia.

**[Tree Sparrow** *Passer montanus]*

This species was recorded in small numbers on both days on Chuuk (18-19 April) where it is believed to be a recent, and presumably ship-assisted, arrival.

**Blue-faced Parrotfinch***Erythrura trichroa*

This species was seen on Weno and Tol South Islands, Chuuk with a total of seven birds recorded on 19 April.

**Red-throated Parrotfinch***Erythrura psittacea*

This New Caledonia endemic was recorded at both Mount Koghi (5 April: 8) and Riviere Bleue (6 April: 4).

**CETACEANS****Sperm Whale***Physter macrocephalus*

This was by far the most frequently recorded cetacean on the voyage with at least thirty three animals encountered across seven widely spread dates. The highest count was off Bougainville (14 April) where at least twelve were seen.

**Sei Whale***Balaenoptera borealis*

At least one animal which was believed to be this species was seen near Torishima on 26 April.

**Short-finned Pilot Whale***Globicephala macrorhynchus*

Seen on three days with the first animals on the sea day south of Norfolk Island (2 April). It was then another ten days before this species was next seen with A recorded off the north coast of Guadalcanal on the afternoon of 12 April. The final sighting was off New Ireland on 15 April where three animals were seen.

**False Killer Whale***Pseudorca crassidens*

This species was recorded for definite on four dates although a number of unidentified pods of ‘Blackfish’ which were likely to have been this species were also seen. The first sightings were on the sea day north of the Hauraki Gulf (1 April) when A was logged, with the remaining sightings being between 12-15 April (Guadalcanal – New Ireland) where a total of fourteen animals were recorded.

**Risso’s Dolphin***Grampus griseus*

The only sighting of the voyage was a pod which was thought to number between 8-10 animals on the sea day off Torishima (26 April).

**Cuvier’s Beaked Whale***Ziphuis cavirostris*

A single individual was seen a day south of New Caledonia (4 April) with a further two animals recorded the following morning.

**Longman’s Beaked Whale***Indopacetus pacificus*

Approximately eight of these rarely seen beaked whales were seen about 20 nautical miles off southern New Caledonia on the morning of 5 April.

**Hubb’s Beaked Whale**

A small pod of approximately six of these extremely poorly known whales was seen in the late afternoon of 26 April (after passing Torishima that morning). This species was the undoubted cetacean highlight of the voyage, although the record was only confirmed from photos (as the animals were somewhat distant) with the white on the heads and beaks visible in a number of pictures which were taken.

**Pygmy Sperm Whale***Kogia breviceps*

Although Kogias have been observed on most WPO voyages, this species seems to be the rarer one. A single individual was seen and photographed in flat seas off Bougainville on 14 April.

**Dwarf Sperm Whale***Kogia breviceps*

Three animals were seen off New Ireland on 15 April with the only other sighting being a lone individual off New Caledonia on the morning of 5 April.

**Bottlenose Dolphin***Tursiops truncatus*

---

A small pod of this widespread species was seen just inside the Chuuk lagoon reef on both 18 and 19 April.

**Spinner Dolphin**

*Stenella longirostris*

The most frequently encountered dolphin with animals seen on five dates. The highest counts were off Guadalcanal (12 April) and a day south of Chuuk (17 April) with a high A recorded on both days.

**Striped Dolphin**

*Stenella coeruleoalba*

The only sighting was north of Torishima (26 April) where A was logged.

**Pantropical Spotted Dolphin**

*Stenella attenuate*

A pod thought to number a dozen or so animals was seen north-east of the Bonin Islands on 25 April.

Compiled by Chris Collins  
May 2010