

WESTERN PACIFIC ODYSSEY

on board HERITAGE ADVENTURER

20 March - 17 April 2023



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Day 1

Monday 20 March

Auckland

Arriving in Auckland, City of Sails, we check into our accommodation and met up with our fellow explorers as we are introduced to the expedition team who outlined our plans for the following day. We retired to our rooms, excited by the adventure that lays ahead.



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Day 2

Tuesday, 21 March

Great Barrier and northern Hauraki Gulf

After leaving Auckland harbour at 1000 yesterday, *Heritage Adventurer* slowly approached the entrance to Port Fitzroy on the east coast of Great Barrier Island in the northern Hauraki Gulf. Breakfast was enjoyed on board surrounded by the lush green forests of Great Barrier.

We prepared for our short Zodiac journey to Glenfern Sanctuary, where ongoing predator control measures on a fenced off peninsula provide a measure of protection to the native fauna. We enjoyed the stroll through the native forest, watching Kaka, New Zealand Pigeon, Tui and Grey Warbler. The awesome view from Sunset Rock was an amazing start to the first expedition morning.

Once back on board we headed north towards the Mokohinau Islands, and in particular Māori Rocks, where we spotted several roosting Grey Ternlets (also known as Grey Noddies). Seabird numbers increased; we added Black Petrels and Flesh-footed and Fluttering Shearwaters to the species list, as well as the attractive Buller's Shearwater and a few Cook's Petrels. Our first albatross was a White-capped Albatross, a long way from its breeding island in the Subantarctic Auckland Islands.

Our prize arrived in the shape of the sought after New Zealand Storm-Petrel, a bird once thought to be extinct until its re-discovery in 2003. At one stage up to eight individuals were observed while other highlights included two White-necked Petrels and a Black-winged Petrel. The weather that had been kind to us all day changed rather quickly and a heavy rain shower moved in, but day one had started with a bang and rain could not dampen our mood.



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Day 3

Wednesday, 22 March

Urupukapuka Island and the Bay of Islands

Heritage Adventurer anchored in the Bay of Islands for an early start for the WPO team, departing from the ship by Zodiac around 0700 to Russell wharf. Here we boarded a ferry to Urupukapuka Island, the largest in the Bay of Islands. It forms part of Project Island Song, an initiative to reintroduce vulnerable bird species to seven predator-free islands in the Bay. Spirits were high as we departed Russell at sunrise on a mostly clear morning.

We were greeted at Urupukapuka by New Zealand Dotterels on the wooden jetty in Otehei Bay and a family of Variable Oystercatchers on an adjacent floating pontoon. Having navigated these distractions, we dispersed around the landing area. Here we were spoiled for choice; Buff-banded Rails strolled around the lawns, while Tuis and North Island Saddlebacks bounced around the planted borders. Small parties of Whiteheads and Red-crowned Parakeets foraged in the surrounding scrub accompanied by Grey Warblers, New Zealand Fantails and Silvereyes, and an obliging pair of North Island Robins was found along a path into denser forest.

From the landing area, a network of trails enticed us to explore more of the island while encountering sheep in some areas. The Manuka scrub edge held several Tomtits, while Pukekos stalked imperially around the pastures, and a few Brown Teal were found on the wetlands. Other less welcome species included Common Starling, Common Myna and Eastern Rosella, as well as Blackbirds and Song Thrushes.

We returned to the landing area shortly after 1100, where we were entertained by a Pied Shag foraging completely unconcerned in the shallows. As we boarded the ferry a school of habituated Snappers implored us to throw them a few crumbs. After this fitting farewell to New Zealand, we returned to *Heritage Adventurer*, stopping en route to inspect two other islands where the rich and famous vacation.

The ship hauled anchor during lunch, and we sailed for Norfolk Island accompanied by a few acrobatic Bottle-nosed Dolphins. Leaving the Bay of Islands, birding was fairly slow, with only one Little Blue Penguin and a handful of Fluttering Shearwaters. Farther offshore we had a small group of Common Dolphin and some distant whale blows. Other birds were slowly added to the daily tally as we steamed north some 25-kilometres off the Northland coast: Flesh-footed and Buller's Shearwaters, Black, Cook's and Black-winged Petrels, and the occasional White-capped Albatross.

Those who didn't persevere on deck were treated to Rod Morris's personal account of the devastating impact of introduced predators on New Zealand wildlife, and the efforts that have been made over recent decades to reverse them. Dinner was accompanied by a glorious sunset over the northern tip of North Island.





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Day 4

Thursday, 23 March

At sea en route to Norfolk Island

This was our first sea day, and a chance to adapt to life on the *Heritage Adventurer*. Most of the birders spent a large part of the day on deck enjoying the many seabirds in the region. The Grey-faced Petrel was arguably the most abundant species, with smaller numbers of Kermadec, White-necked, Cook's and Black-winged Petrels. A few Black Petrels continued to follow the ship, entertaining those on the ship's stern, and were joined occasionally by other species, including a Wilson's Storm-petrel. We had the first of many Wedge-tailed Shearwaters, and surprising numbers of tailed Skuas, but the birds that caused most discussion were a pair of White-bellied Gadfly Petrels that had everyone on board scratching their heads. There were suggestions of Herald Petrel, but they lacked white wing flashes, and after some debate it was concluded that they must be aberrant Grey-faced Petrels. Subsequent exchanges led to other records of pale-bellies in this and other petrel species, apparently as a result of unusual wear.

For those wanting a break from birding, Chris Todd gave an informative presentation on Norfolk Island, regaling the island's tale of explorers, mutineers and convicts. After lunch, part 1 of the 1984 film *The Bounty* was screened in the lounge. This dramatised the story of Lieutenant Bligh, whose cruelty led to a mutiny on his ship. The left over popcorn was enjoyed by the birders on the aft deck!



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Day 5

Friday, 24 March

Norfolk Island

We awoke at dawn to a spectacular view of Phillip and Norfolk Island. Seabirds were abundant with large numbers of Wedge-tailed Shearwaters, Black-winged Petrels, Tasman Boobies, White Terns and Black and Brown Noddies, as well as the occasional Grey Ternlet.

Confusion over which landing site to use in the swelly conditions led to a slight delay in getting ashore. When we eventually had the answer, we had to steam around to Cascade on the island's east coast. As we navigated the island, we started seeing Red-tailed Tropicbirds and Great Frigatebirds along the rugged coastline, clothed in majestic, endemic Norfolk pines.

During breakfast we waited anxiously to hear from the expedition team whether conditions were OK for landing. Fortunately the news was good and we were soon boarding Zodiacs and heading ashore through decidedly bumpy seas. Once there, a 20-minute bus drive through the rustic countryside brought us to the National Park (with keen Australian listers adding some dubious Jungle-fowl to their lists!). Within a few minutes, we had seen most of the five endemic birds we were seeking, including Slender-billed White-eye, Norfolk Island Gerygone, Robin and Whistler. That left only the elusive Norfolk Island Parakeet on everyone's want list, but during the next two hours many birders also found this tricky species. During this time we were free to wander along the network of walking trails in the park, enjoying the impressive diversity of plants, including many ferns, palms and towering Norfolk pines.

With noon approaching we returned to the wharf where we were entertained by the aerial displays of Black-winged Petrels while waiting to return to the ship. Lunch was enjoyed on board as the *Heritage Adventurer* sailed north towards New Caledonia. Late in the afternoon we were rewarded with a few glimpses of Providence and Tahiti Petrels, good omens for the tropical birding awaiting us in the coming days.



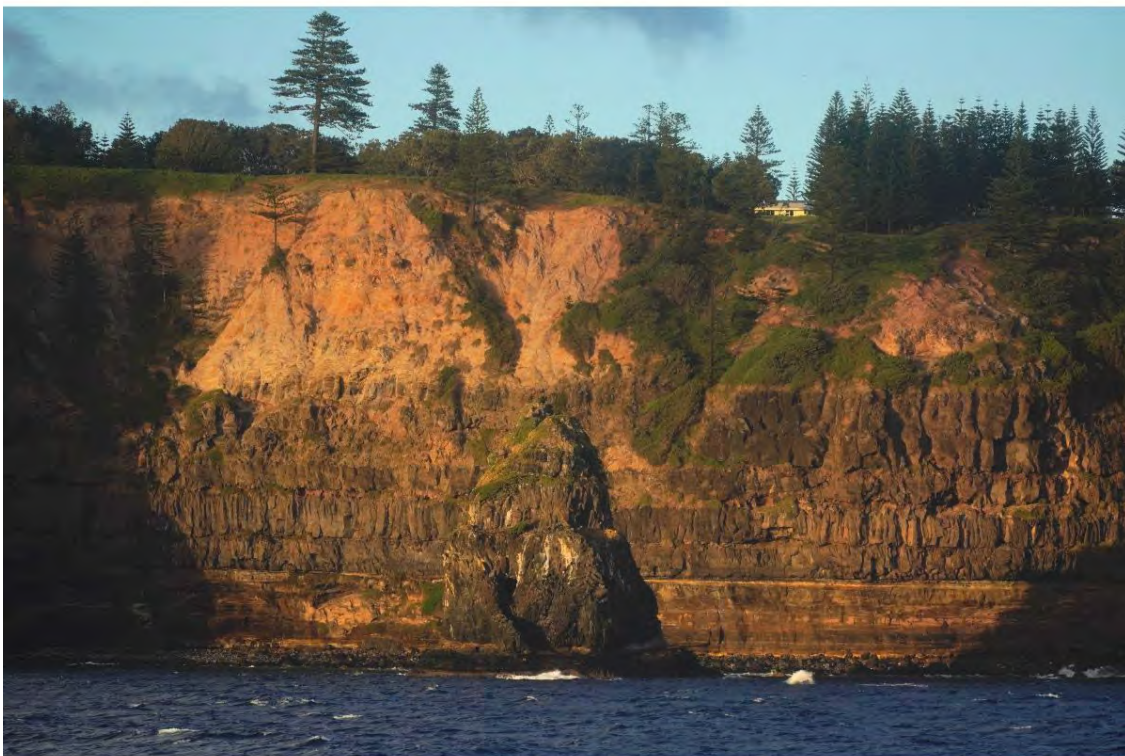
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Day 6

Saturday, 25 March

At sea en route to New Caledonia

After yesterday's enjoyable time on Norfolk Island we sailed through the high seas en route to New Caledonia and awoke to a beautiful sunrise, calm seas and partly cloudy skies. Around 0700 some of us were lucky to spot several dolphins just off the bow of the ship.

The intrepid birders among us were busy scanning the ocean for sea birds. Numbers were sparse, but we were encouraged by a steady trickle of Providence Petrels and the promise of seeing the first Gould's Petrel. In the late morning, Chris Todd introduced several highlights of New Caledonia. Our excellent lunch options were made even better by a Pasta Live Cooking Station on the Bistro Deck which was a tasty treat. Later Matt Jones highlighted the plight of the many seabirds that fall victim to long-line fishing.

In the afternoon looked for the rarely seen, and very poorly known, New Caledonia Storm-petrel. The weather was very windy but birders are a hardy lot and the decks were full as we searched for the elusive Storm-petrel. Single individuals of both Wilson's and White-bellied Storm-petrels were observed, together with large numbers of Wedge-tailed Shearwaters, Black-winged Petrels and our first Gould's Petrels, but unfortunately no New Caledonia Storm-petrel was seen. Another new species for the trip was the White-tailed Tropicbird.

During an extended recap session Chris Collins introduced us to the many different birds we hope to see during our visit to New Caledonia. The day finished with yet another delicious dinner.



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Day 7

Sunday, 26 March:

New Caledonia

After a good night's sleep we awoke to calm seas with very little breeze or swell.

Out on deck we looked for the seldom-seen New Caledonia Storm-petrel observing loads of Wedge-tailed Shearwaters and Gould's Petrels wheeling about above accompanied by the odd Tahiti Petrel and Frigatebird, but unfortunately the Storm-petrel never put in an appearance.

As we entered the reef around New Caledonia, Black-naped Terns were roosting on the shipping marker buoys while several Great Crested Terns could be found inside the lagoon. Another channel marker buoy sported four Ospreys, and there were Reef Herons and Silver Gulls as we came into Noumea Harbour.

After lunch alongside the wharf, we disembarked and had solid ground underfoot for the first time in a few days as we loaded into mini-buses for a trip up to Mount Koghi. The birding was insane and at times frenetic as we picked New Caledonian Imperial Pigeons, Striated Starlings, Green-backed White-eye and South Melanesian Cuckoo-shrike before we'd even left the carpark!

The group split roughly in half with one group going into the forest and the other opting to bird the access road. Thanks to the great ears and eyes of local guide Isobel, both groups picked up great birds including New Caledonian Crow, New Caledonian Myzomela, Cloven-feathered Dove, Metallic Pigeon, Southern Shrikebill, Yellow-bellied Robin, Barred Honeyeater and New Caledonian Friarbird, to name a few. With about an hour left, Chris heard a Thicketbird (New Caledonian Grassbird) which he managed to get most of the guests on to - an incredible bird to end the outing. It had been a great day with lots of "lifers" all round and happy people at dinner. We were joined for dinner by the manager of Parc de la Rivière Bleue, Jean-Marc and his wife, to thank him for allowing us access to the park on a Monday, and for having his team work overtime to repair the roads in the park following recent heavy rains which saw over 500-millimetres fall in 24 hours!



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Day 8

Monday, 27 March:

New Caledonia

A very early start saw us getting up for a 0330 breakfast and a morning of birding at Parc de la Rivière Bleue. There was a sense of great anticipation as we boarded the two buses that were to transfer us to the park, about 45-minutes-drive from Noumea. However, there were some anxious moments when a warning siren on the second bus started screeching, and had to pull over several times as the driver discussed whether we could continue. Fortunately he decided we could do so, but we all buckled up as the bus hurtled down narrow mountain roads with the warning siren still ringing throughout the bus.

Once at the park we were met by our local guide Isobel, and we drove on to the wooden bridge over the large dam that forms the heart of the park. Here we had to disembark and walk across the bridge in groups of 10 to another fleet of smaller buses and vans for the remaining 8-kilometres to our birding site in the forest. Once there, we didn't have to wait long for the action to start, with both New Caledonian Cuckoo-shrike and New Caledonian Parakeet appearing while we waited for everyone to assemble. A short walk down the road and everyone had the star of the show, the Kagu, in the bag. Over the course of the morning we would see at least 10 of these magnificent birds.

Once the first Kagu was seen by all, we were free to wander along the road through the towering forest, or explore the short trails leading off the road. As the morning progressed we had great views on most of the New Caledonian endemics including Horned Parakeet and Cloven-feathered Dove. A few birders bumped into the critically endangered Crow Honeyeater, but it remained elusive for most until Isobel heard one calling near a fruiting tree near the Grand Kauri tree. With patience most of the group got a good look at a spectacular honeyeater, of which only a few hundred survive.

After a hearty baguette for lunch, we returned to the buses. A brief stop at the park entrance failed to find any Parrot Finches (a bird some had already seen at Mount Koghi), but allowed those who had missed Horned Parakeet to catch up with this striking bird. Then it was back to Noumea and a welcome cool shower aboard *Heritage Adventurer* after the morning's exertions. Once we were all aboard, the ship sailed through the reef around the southern tip of New Caledonia to continue our travel north. All in all, it was a fantastic day, with everyone feeling happy as we bid farewells the pilot who had guided us through the reef. Many thanks to Jean-Marc and his team for opening the Parc de la Rivière Bleue for us.



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Day 9

Tuesday, 28 March:

At sea en route to the Solomon Islands

Heritage Adventurer slowly headed north, leaving New Caledonia far behind. The birders enjoyed another sea day, adding several new species to the list, including Magnificent Petrel, Tropical Shearwater, Lesser Frigatebird, and two sought-after Storm-petrels: Polynesian and Band-rumped, with the latter possibly being an undescribed taxon given the extensive splitting within this species complex. We also had better views of White-tailed Tropicbirds and Wedge-tailed Shearwaters.

In the morning, Chris gave a fantastic introduction to the Solomon Islands which whetted our appetite for our next destination. Then after lunch there was a briefing for anyone wishing to snorkel in the Solomons, which involved issuing masks, snorkels and fins.

With birds few and far between, the photographers turned their attention to the many varieties of flying fish flushed by the vessel. The calm waters made for stunning photo opportunities of fish in flight, balanced by their reflections in the water surface. The calm water also made it easy to see the occasional drifting coconut and other floating debris. As another day

drew to a close we were treated to an absolutely stunning sunset surrounded by a glassy, calm sea, enlivened by a young Red-footed Booby chasing flying fish at the bow of the vessel.



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Day 10

Wednesday, 29 March:

At sea en route to the Solomon Islands

For the second successive day, we were at sea all day. Dawn found *Heritage Adventurer* steaming north parallel to the coast of Espirito Santo, the largest island in Vanuatu. Even though we were some 40-kilometres off the island, its impressively mountainous terrain was clearly visible throughout the early morning. The calm weather from yesterday persisted, although there was a bit more wind ruffle on the water and a gentle swell which made it a bit more tricky to use a telescope on deck. The smooth seas were ideal for spotting cetaceans, and the early risers were treated to tantalising views of several distant groups of dolphins, one of which was confirmed as Fraser's Dolphin.

Birds were few and far between, with even the ubiquitous Wedge-tailed Shearwaters becoming scarce. In addition to the odd group of Sooty Terns, there were surprising numbers of jaegers – predominantly Pomarine, but with a few Arctics and one Long-tailed. On the Gadfly Petrel front, 'Magnificent' Collared Petrels and Providence Petrels vied for top spot with a handful of each. Polynesian Storm-petrels remained elusive, with only a few very distant birds sighted, but we had good views of one of the local forms of Band-rumped Storm-petrel, which flushed from the water just ahead of the ship.

Hopes were high that we would see more birds around mid-day when the ship was west of the Banks Islands where colonies of Magnificent and Vanuatu Petrels can be found. Lunch for many was enlivened by a Magnificent Petrel running close in up the side of the ship, offering the best views of the species to date. However, pride of place went to a very obliging 'Lava' Petrel, which crossed the bow shortly after lunch, allowing many on board great views of this enigmatic blackish petrel with extravagant white wing flashes above and below. The afternoon also brought more distant cetacean sightings, including one group of Beaked Whales and a pod of Pygmy Killer Whales.

Given the slow day on deck, many birders attended the day's lectures, which included Coleen Moloney's illuminating talk on bioluminescence, and Peter Ryan's fascinating introduction to seabird biology. For those wishing to practice their snorkelling skills, there was practice session in the pool with some of the expedition staff. After another glorious sunset we gathered in the lounge for the recap and briefing, where Chris Collins revealed the plans for the next few days in the Solomon Islands. Given an early start tomorrow at Nendo, most retired to bed straight after the post-dinner bird list.



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Day 11

Thursday, 30 March

Nendo Island, Santa Cruz archipelago

We had an early start today with breakfast available from 0500. The first Zodiac departed for the shores of Nendo Island, the largest of the Santa Cruz Islands, while it was still dark to pick up the Solomon Island Customs and Immigration officials. We had been advised that today would be a day of exploration because the exact location of the site where we would be able to do our birdwatching had yet to be clearly identified.

By 0600 *Heritage Adventurer* had been cleared and we were ready to go ashore in calm conditions. We landed in a shallow river mouth in a picturesque inlet. The birders went ashore first and worked their way along a forest track where they enjoyed seeing three localised endemics: Santa Cruz and Sandford's White-eyes and Temotu Whistler. We also saw hundreds of Mackinlay's Cuckoo-doves, Rufous Fantails, the exquisite Red-bellied Fruit-doves, Cardinal Myzomelas and Temotu Flying Foxes. Returning to the landing site, we were welcomed by a group of locals dressed in traditional clothing who offered refreshing coconuts to drink.

After leaving Nendo Island we all had a chance at looking at Mt Tinakula, an active volcano. Recent lava flows could clearly be seen on the west side of the mountain. We enjoyed beautiful sunshine viewing flying fishes in the afternoon before a tropical rain shower brought us all inside. Suzanne introduced us to the 'Kastom' practices of the people of the Solomon Islands and a great day was rounded off by yet another delicious dinner prepared by our galley team.



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Day 12

Friday, 31 March

Makira, Solomon Islands

Overnight *Heritage Adventurer* arrived off the eastern end of Makira in the main Solomon Islands. Members of the expedition team ventured ashore well before dawn to check the status of a forestry track where we hoped to go birding. Unfortunately the track was overgrown, so we landed at a nearby village where we were welcomed by the local community. Birding was productive in the forest and farm-bush around the village, with highlights including Makira Honeyeater, Sooty Myzomela and the tiny Mottled Flowerpecker. We also three resident Imperial-pigeons: Chestnut-bellied, Island and Red-knobbed. More gaudy species seen included the Yellow-bibbed Lory, Papuan Eclectus Parrot and Yellow-bibbed Fruit-dove. We returned to the ship for lunch and then sailed for Guadalcanal. The route along the north shore of Makira passed through yet more glassy calm seas alive with small flying fish. In the late afternoon, Frank presented *The Joy of Birding*, chronicling his lifetime commitment to birding. In his typically dry, understated way he left the audience amazed by his many achievements, which include discovering two birds, one in Indonesia and another in Peru.



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Day 13

Saturday, 1 April

Honiara, Guadalcanal

Overnight *Heritage Adventurer* arrived off Honiara, the capital of the Solomon Islands, and another very early start saw us leaving the ship well before dawn. Once ashore at the Breakwater Cafe, we boarded a fleet of buses for the short drive to Mount Austen passing the Japanese war memorial as we climbed into the hills behind the town. We parked on the crest of the ridge with a stunning view both out to sea and inland over the verdant forested valleys that cover much of Guadalcanal.

There was some excitement when a Woodford's Rail called, but it remained stubbornly out of sight. Later a few lucky birders bumped into a few of these skulking birds along the track. As the sun rose, we started birding down the track on the inland side of the hill, breaking into smaller groups each moving at their preferred pace. The birding was extremely productive, with a spectacular array of birds ranging from the massive Blyth's Hornbill to the diminutive Midget Flowerpecker. Most people managed to connect with the localised Ultramarine Kingfisher and Black-faced Myzomela, but the Buff-headed Coucal proved challenging for many. Those that walked all the way to the end of the track were rewarded with a pair of White-billed Crows that flew over the valley.

The walk back up the hill crest was less arduous than anticipated, and there was always the option to hitch a ride in the 4x4 pick-up that delivered cold water to birders along the track. We spent time admiring the view and were rewarded with several sightings of Sanford's Sea Eagles!

At noon we retraced our steps to the Breakwater Cafe, where most returned to the ship for lunch. A few people elected to remain in town exploring until the last Zodiac headed back around 1430. Shortly thereafter the ship lifted anchor and we headed off towards our next stop, Tetepare Island. There were few birds to see along the northern shore of Guadalcanal, but it became livelier once we left the island, with numerous Greater Crested Terns diving onto fish at the bow.



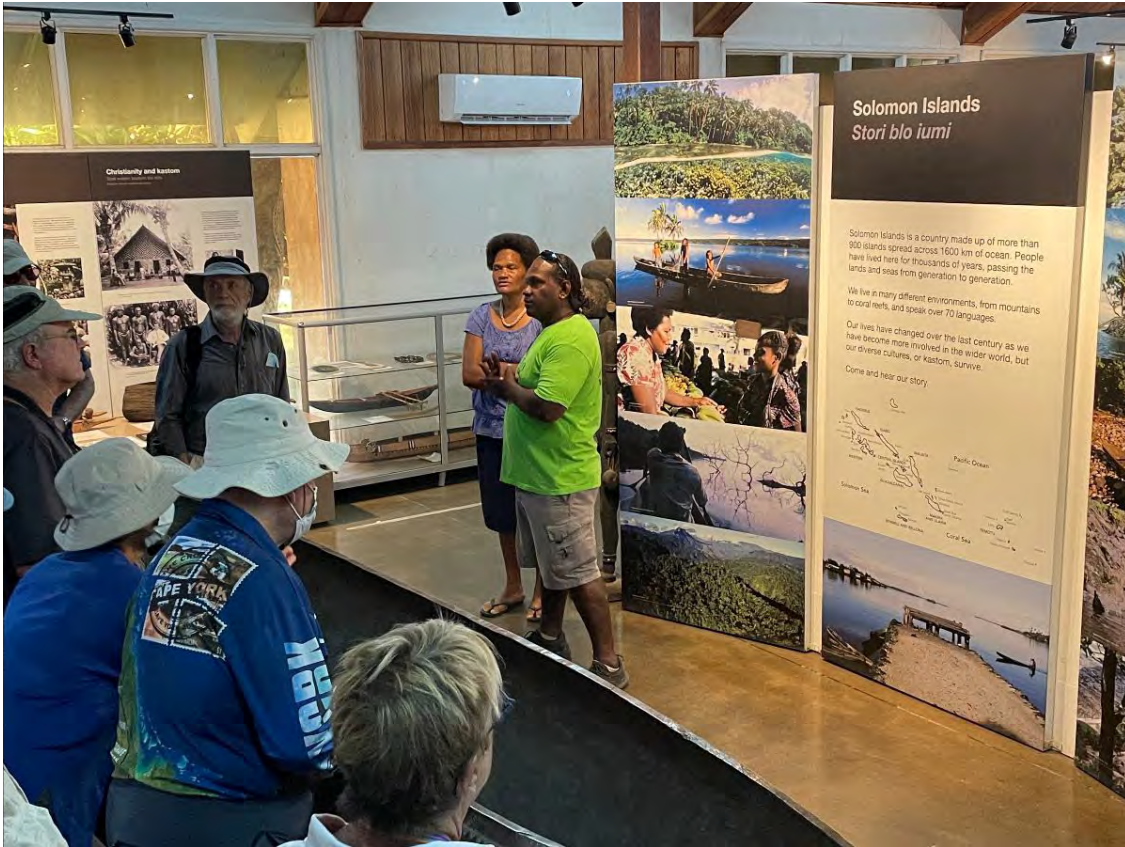
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Day 14

Sunday, 2 April

Tetepare and Rendova Islands, Solomon Islands

Another early start for the birders on our fourth consecutive morning on land in the Solomon Islands. This morning we were on the Island of Tetepare, where the high humidity made for a very hot morning. Despite the heat, the birding was fantastic from the get-go, with Beach Kingfisher, Melanesian Megapode and White-capped monarch all seen around the landing site.

The local guides arranged a welcome ceremony where they displayed a giant skink and a Cuscus, and we were led through the forest to marvel at the enormous strangler figs. As the morning progressed, some caught glimpses of the elusive White-winged Fantail and Kolombangara Monarch after some careful stalking with the local guides along the forest paths. Before returning to the ship for lunch we enjoyed good views of perched Moustached Treeswift and Sanford's Sea-eagle around the landing site, with the latter flying low over a Zodiac as it left Tetepare.

In the afternoon we landed on the Island of Rendova just nearby Tetepare. After a traditional welcome, some of us spread out along a forest track while others escaped the heat to try some snorkelling. Earlier today we had seen Dark-eyed White-eye on Tetepare, in the afternoon on Rendova a few were lucky enough to catch a glimpse of the *paradoxus* subspecies of Dark-eyed White-eye endemic to the island. By the time the Zodiacs were due to leave everyone had a much better chance to see a White-winged Fantail and Kolombangara Monarch on Rendova than earlier this morning. The sun set on an idyllic scene of gentle waves and coconut palms as the last Zodiacs bid farewell to Rendova and returned to the ship.



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Day 15

Monday, 3 April

Kolombangara Island

Four Zodiacs left *Heritage Adventure* at 0515 am, with sunrise still an hour away. The group of birders landed on to a small wharf on Kolombangara and loaded into awaiting flat-bed trucks. This might sound like the start of a spy movie, but in fact it was the start of another fantastic day's birdwatching in Solomon Islands. In the first light of dawn we drove for about 30 minutes on a well-maintained gravel road through a mix of native forest and eucalypt plantations. The island is divided into several zones that include conservation at the higher altitudes (above 400-metres) administered by the Kolombangara Island Biodiversity Conservation Association and managed forestry at the lower elevations.

The trucks reached their destination, Imbu Rano, before sunrise. We all piled onto the lodge balcony overlooking a densely forested valley, with the far side rising up towards the the highest peak, Mt Veve, rising to 1779-metres. Our first goal was to spot a Pale Mountain-pigeon, and one of the sharp-eyed guides soon found a distant fruiting tree full of Red-knobbed Imperial-pigeons and a few Pale Mountain-pigeons.

We then birded along the road leading to the lodge, where bird parties contained an array of sought-after species including Superb Fruit-dove, Finsch's Pygmy-parrot, Yellow-vented Myzomela, Barred Cuckoo-shrike, Grey-capped Cicadabird, Oriole Whistler, Steel-blue Flycatcher, Kolombangara Monarch and Solomon's White-eye.

After a few hours of very productive birding we headed back to the ship, stopping en route to try to lure a Roviana Rail into the open. Although we failed to see the rail, it did call back, which was encouraging given recent declines in the species due to feral dogs. Before boarding the Zodiacs we were entertained by the rhythmic sounds of the island's local band, which used an array of PVC pipes recycled after a recent cyclone and old flip-flops to create the most amazing sounds. While the men were playing the pipes the women sang for us in beautiful voices. We also had a chance to buy locally made wooden carvings.

A small pod of Indo-Pacific Bottlenose Dolphins accompanied us on our ride back to the ship, passing the Panama registered vessel *Microchip* loading timber destined for China. The gangway of our ship was visited by women in a canoe laden with orchids and other beautiful flowers, which the ship's purser bought to decorate the lounge. After another incredible lunch, Coleen presented on the negative impacts caused by ocean acidification, a result of climate change. We then headed north along the coast of Kolombangara, looking for cetaceans and the rare Heinroth's Shearwaters. We also sighted a few shearwaters like the ubiquitous Wedge-tailed Shearwaters, Noddies, Terns, Frigatebirds and Boobies.

That evening we learned that we would be unable to land at Chuuk, but Chris had arranged an extra day's birding in the Solomon's, with landings planned on Kolombangara and Ranongga. Banter throughout the bar that evening was that the Solomon Islands is an awesome birdwatching destination.



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Day 16

Tuesday, 4 April

Kolombangara and Ranongga Islands

At 0600 most birders departed the ship for a morning's birding around Hambere Village on the west coast of Kolombangara, hoping in particular to see the Roviana Rail. Despite hearing their calls at several spots around the village, only a few lucky birders managed to actually see one of these elusive, almost flightless birds, which remained well concealed in the dense understorey. Consolation came in the form of several groups of the beautiful Duchess Lorikeets, which were greatly outnumbered by the larger and startlingly bright red, and noisy, Cardinal Lorikeets.

At 0730, the remaining birders joined everyone else for an extended Zodiac cruise through some beautiful mangrove forest bordering an inland channel along the coast. Chris Todd explained the important role that mangroves play in protecting from coastal land erosion, as a habitat for biodiversity, and as a nursery for fish species. We slowly cruised along enjoying good views of several kingfishers, Eclectus Parrots, Blyth's Hornbills, several pigeons and an obliging pair of Northern Macronesian Cuckoo-shrikes. Back at Hambere Village we were greeted with demonstrations plus weaving and food preparation, while the early-morning birders went cruising the mangroves.

It was then time to head back to the ship so that it could cruise over to Ranongga Island while we enjoyed another great lunch. In the early afternoon we rushed ashore, with most birders heading off in pursuit of the endemic Ranongga White-eye, while some elected for a last snorkel on the island's stunning coral reefs. Sadly we had to leave shortly after 1530 and clear customs at Gizo ahead of our departure from the Solomon Islands. It had been six days of non-stop adventure and we were all sad to leave these lovely islands and their very friendly inhabitants.



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Day 17

Wednesday, 5 April:

At sea off Bougainville and New Ireland

Another stunning sunrise found us steaming northwest in calm seas off the coast of Bougainville Island, the easternmost island of Papua New Guinea. Despite the action-packed last week, the decks were busy with birders hoping for some good seabirds and cetaceans in these seldom-visited waters. The birding was quite slow, relieved mainly by Boobies chasing flying fish flushed by the ship, but some enigmatic, small all-dark petrels led to speculation about possible *Pseudobulweria* petrels. Our main goal was Beck's Petrel, but the first few 'Tahiti-type' petrels proved to be the much commoner Tahiti Petrel. Then in mid-morning, just as we were leaving Bougainville astern, a large dark petrel with bold white wing flashes took off the water and flew right under the bow, giving crippling views of the still undescribed 'Lava Petrel'. The birding livened up again as we approached New Ireland, with mixed flocks of shearwaters, including our first Streaked Shearwaters, joining the Terns, Noddies, Noobies and Frigates. We later managed to find several distant Beck's Petrels, and enjoyed a spectacular sunset over New Ireland from the monkey island.



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Day 18

Thursday, 6 April

Crossing the Equator at sea

Today *Heritage Adventurer* passed the halfway point on its epic transit from New Zealand to Japan. Seabirds and cetaceans were thin on the ground, and even the flying fish became sparse as we approached the Equator, allowing even the most dedicated birders the chance to take a break from being on deck. Some spent the day checking their photos, or catching up on their sleep, while others enjoyed the various lectures and documentaries on offer. In the evening we gathered on deck to celebrate crossing the Equator, with expedition leader Chris Collins counting down the crossing. King Neptune put in a surprise appearance, with his biosecurity brush!



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Day 19

Friday, 7 April

At sea in the 'dead zone'

Today we continued to cruise through the so-called 'Dead Zone', with few birds to be seen. Add in regular tropical downpours, and the decks were again mostly empty for much of the day. The birding highlight for most aboard were a few Brown Noddies that visited the ship, sometimes even perching on the ship's rails. Lectures were well attended; Peter repeated his talk highlighting many fascinating aspects of seabird biology for the many birders who missed it earlier in the trip, while Coleen pointed out that we shouldn't call this area the dead zone because it is teeming with microscopic life in her fascinating presentation on the invisible ocean. More time was spent in the observation lounge, working, playing or simply enjoying the view.



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Day 20

Saturday, 8 April:

Cruising through Micronesia

Today our route took us close to a few reefs and two low-lying islands where there was more to see. The island of Pulusuk, close to 100-miles from Chuuk, provided thousands of Noddies, a couple of Tropical Shearwaters and an interesting Petrel sitting on the water. The Petrel allowed a very close approach by the boat, not taking flight even when circled by the ship for a second and third look. Closer inspection revealed the bird's feathers were very worn, hampering efforts to identify it to species. Its bill structure suggested that it was either a Tahiti or Beck's Petrel, but further research will be needed to confirm its identification. During the afternoon most on board took the opportunity to relax, while guest lecturer Matt Eade gave an excellent talk on the birds of Papua New Guinea. We also passed the small island of Puluwat, but no new birds were added to the list.



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Day 21

Sunday, 9 April:

At sea between Micronesia and the Mariana Islands

Easter Sunday started with the choice of 0700 Pilates led by guest Robyn, on the monkey deck, or pie and lattes while scanning for birds. *Heritage Adventurer* continued moving north in the Northern Hemisphere treating guests with a fairly close view of a Bulwer's Petrel. Other species seen during the day included White and Sooty Terns, Red and White-tailed Tropicbirds and the ubiquitous Wedge-tailed Shearwaters.

On board activities today include lectures from expedition team member Thomas about how his experiences in the Arctic and Antarctic resulted in his passion for conserving the rainforest around his home near Mission Beach in northern Queensland. The afternoon's guest lecturer was award winning poet, author and photographer Charles Hood, who gave a colourful talk provocatively entitled *What is Nature?*, which questioned many of the stereotypes about how people perceive and portray nature as something apart from our everyday experiences. He illustrated his talk with some of his amazing images of wildlife in both 'natural' and 'unnatural' settings.

Towards dusk, many were entertained by Red-footed Boobies chasing flying fish flushed by the vessel. Others took part in a scavenger hunt, which had them deciphering cryptic clues to find a series of hidden letters secreted around the ship, which together spelled out *Heritage*.



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Day 22

Monday, 10 April:

At sea off the Mariana Islands

Dawn found *Heritage Adventurer* roughly 160-kilometres east of Saipan, accompanied by several Red-footed and Brown Boobies, which entertained the early risers with their antics in pursuit of flying fish. At times it seemed as though the fish were toying with the Boobies, flushing in small flotillas often some distance from the ship, but almost always crashing back into the sea before the Boobies could reach them. Smaller numbers of Terns and Noddies flew by, but there were only a few shearwaters. Robyn once again led her pre-breakfast Qigong session on the monkey island.

Later in the morning the number of Boobies attending the ship increased, with Masked Boobies joining the fray. Rod gave a fascinating talk on island radiations, explaining how colonists on islands adapt to their new homes, and evolve to occupy vacant niches. In the guest lecture slot after lunch, Hadass Shlagman explained her art, which uses a variety of icons to depict a range of issues. Since the 1980s she has been working on thick black roofing paper, which she paints and scores to create her unique images.

With temperatures outside cooling off, people aggregated outside to watch the Boobies perform. With good numbers of all three species around the ship, it was fascinating to see their different approaches to catching their suppers: Masked Boobies plunged gannet-like into the sea, while the Red-footed Boobies mostly chased flying fish in the air, and the Brown Boobies seemed to spend most of their time attempting to steal fish from other birds. Every chase was accompanied by raucous squawks from the Boobies followed by "oohs" and "ahhs" from onlookers. Other noteworthy birds include a Grey-backed Tern, which was guest Mike Goddard's 8,000th bird!



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Day 23

Tuesday, 11 April

At sea off the northern Mariana Islands

Early risers saw a Bulwer's Petrel a few metres off the bow and found a Sooty Tern on deck. The weather hadn't really changed overnight, with choppy waters, a relatively strong wind and scattered rain storms.

As we passed east of the impressive 976-metre tall Agrihan Island, an almost uninhabited (population allegedly nine) volcano in the Northern Mariana chain of islands (USA), *Heritage Adventurer* again became a beacon for roving (Indo-Pacific) Brown Boobies, with up to 10 circling the boat simultaneously as they watched for feeding opportunities around the boat. Occasionally they would all rush towards a distant fish, diving into the sea in pursuit, and once successful several birds would squabble loudly in the water. The occasional Matsudaira's Storm-petrel and Bulwer's Petrel passed us fairly close, but cetacean sightings were difficult because of the choppy sea and rolling waves.

The next island we passed was Asuncion, an active strata volcano, the cone stretching into the low clouds and perhaps home to the many recently fledged Red-footed Boobies that came to greet the ship, some even trying to land on the bow. Luckily they didn't succeed because the metal would surely have burnt their feet in the 35°C temperatures we were experiencing during the hottest part of the day.

After lunch more and more Matsudaira's Storm-petrels followed in our wake, whilst a third close Grey-backed Tern graced the bow fleetingly, but like the others we had seen, would not deviate from its purposeful westerly flight. We passed west of the Maug Archipelago, a sunken volcanic peak with a 2-kilometre wide breached caldera that extends 200-metres below sea

level. As the sun dropped lower, and more birders ventured onto the cooling bow, we passed the northernmost of the Mariana Islands, another active volcano called Farallon de Pajaros. As the sun set we steamed into the night.



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Day 24

Wednesday, 12 April

At sea steaming towards the Volcano Islands

Dawn found several Boobies that had spent the night on *Heritage Adventurer*. Matt Jones assisted two of them to depart from the bow so that they could take up their usual residency flying around the ship and entertaining us with their incredible acrobatics.

After breakfast, Matt Jones was again centre stage, this time giving an illuminating and humorous presentation about his adopted homeland: Stewart Island Birding: a Little Bit on the Silly Side. Mid-afternoon brought a treat in the form of guest lecturer, Gary Wilson, and his talk Ecosystems, Mapping and Biodiversity Conservation, followed by Rod's introduction to the next episode of the BBC documentary *The Private Life of Plants*.

This afternoon we were at sea, sailing towards a sea mount south of the evocatively named Volcano Islands. These islands are home to colonies of Bannerman's Shearwater where a few were observed along with a 100-strong host of the delicate Matsudaira's Storm-petrels close to the ship, together with several pale-morph Wedge-tailed Shearwaters, Bonin Petrels and Long-tailed Skuas. All in all, an excellent day at sea!



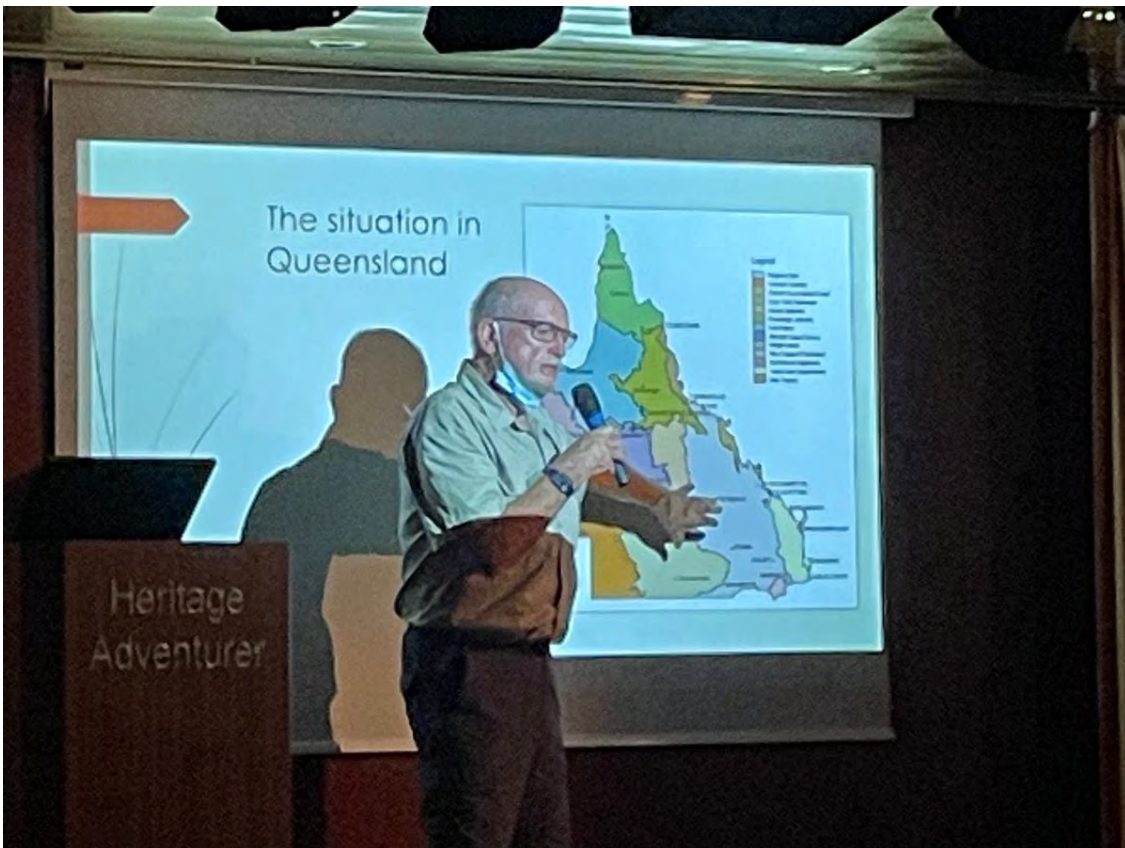
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Day 25

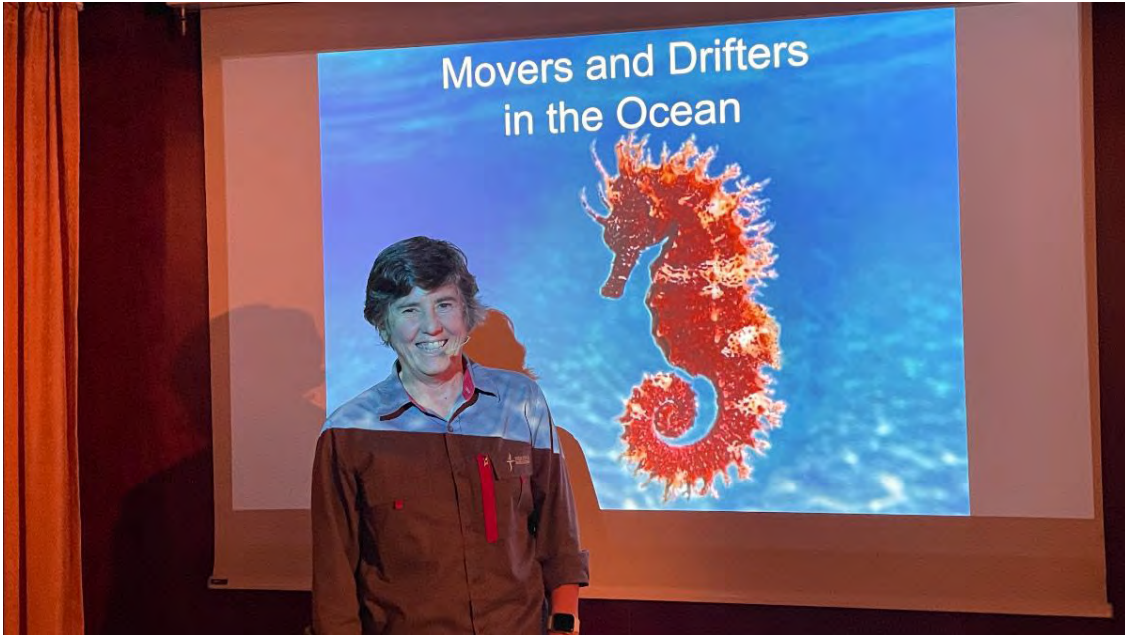
Thursday, 13 April

Chichijima – looking for Bryan's Shearwater

Today we cruised north towards the Bonin Islands and the morning greeted us with foggy conditions and poor visibility. We had left the warmth of the tropics behind and it was a very pleasant 21°C on deck. Some of the birders could be seen on the monkey deck wearing down jackets – what a contrast to a few days ago when the temperature was above 30°C.

The bird life observed during most of the day was mainly Boobies, including Masked which is something of a rarity in Japanese waters. A lone Sperm Whale was also sighted logging on the surface, and the ship altered course so that we could get a better view but unfortunately it dived and was not seen again. Coleen gave a talk on Movers and Drifters in the Ocean, describing the pelagic 'blue' community of drifters as well as the daily vertical movement of mesopelagics, which is the largest migration on earth. In the afternoon Denzil Morgan gave a presentation on his quest to see 10,000 birds, illustrated by his lovely images of some of the world's most striking and hard-to-see birds.

The highlight of the day came in the late afternoon when we sailed along the rugged southern and eastern shoreline of the Japanese island of Chichijima. The island, located 240-kilometres north of Iwo Jima, is the largest and most populous in the Ogasawara Islands. Everyone gathered on deck to enjoy views of the island's steep rocky shores. The birders were very keen to spot the very rare Bryan's Shearwater, which breeds on a large rock stack off the island. Several Bannerman's Shearwaters were among the large flocks of Wedge-tailed Shearwaters, but it was only as dusk fell that a possible Bryan's was sighted by which time many birders had given up on the bird. Because of the beautiful scenery, recap was kept very brief and shortly after we were treated to yet another beautifully prepared and presented dinner.



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Day 26

Friday, 14 April

At sea between the Bonin Islands and Torishima

Today we are at sea after passing the island of Chichijima at dusk last evening, and we are now on route to Torishima - expecting to arrive around midday tomorrow.

Observations today included some of the pelagic drifter species described by Coleen in her talk yesterday: By-the-wind Sailors (*Velella velella*), and Violet Foam Snails (*Janthina* spp.), violet-purple molluscs the size of garden snails, drifting by beneath their floating bubble rafts.

We also attracted a juvenile Red-footed Booby which rested on the bow for much of the day, and stayed on overnight. A handful of Brown Boobies persisted through the day, plus a couple of Black-footed Albatrosses in the distance. In the afternoon Tristram's Storm-petrel were observed, the first sighting of this species for many on board

Talks today included Frank on 'Threatened Land Birds of the Asia Pacific Region', one of the guests, Robyn talked about her experiences 'Nature Journaling', and Rod talked about 'Taxonomy - the Importance of a Name'. So much to learn and absorb before it was time to visit Torishima Island.



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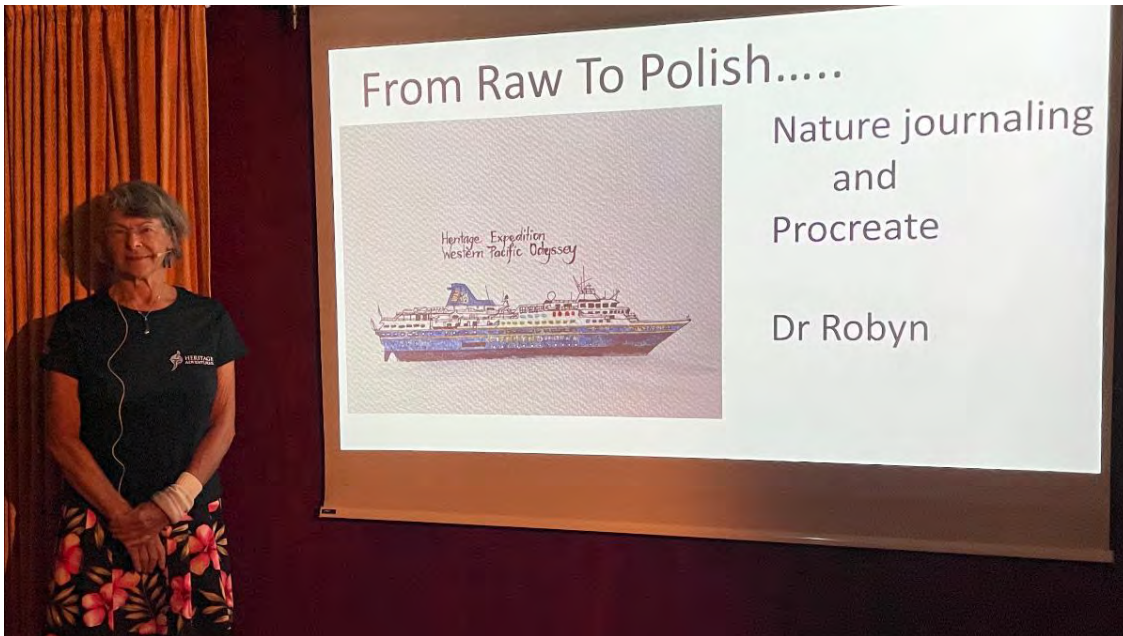
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Day 27

Saturday, 15 April

Torishima Island

It was a very important day for birding as *Heritage Adventurer* sailed towards the island of Torishima for our first real chance of seeing the legendary Short-tailed Albatross. This beautiful, graceful bird was thought extinct in the 1940s due to massive hunting for their feathers in the late 18th and early 19th Centuries. Fortunately a few immature birds survived at sea and returned to Torishima after the feather hunters left. Their numbers have now risen to more than 4,000 birds.

As we slowly approached the island, tension mounted as all we saw were large numbers of Black-footed Albatrosses.

Luckily as we reached the island we saw a kaleidoscope of plumages ranging from adults in their black and white plumage and golden heads to the brown and tan coloured immature and juvenile birds. As we circumnavigated the island, the birds put a fantastic show for the photographers and birders alike. An Eastern Buzzard soaring over the island was an unexpected bonus.

The birds were joined by several Humpback Whales, which breached, tail-slapped, and even followed the ship for a few miles after leaving Torishima. The rain started in the late afternoon, so we retired to the lounge where Peter gave a talk on New Zealand's Subantarctic Islands, highlighting how they differ from all the other Subantarctic Islands around the world. The evening was topped off with a light-hearted quiz hosted by Matt about places, birds and people we had encountered on our month long-voyage from New Zealand. Aike kicked off the quiz evening by performing a beautiful traditional dance to provide context for the first question: which country did she come from? The competition was fierce but the honours were awarded to Gill, who elected not to take part, merely observing the fun and games.



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Day 28

Sunday, 16 April 2023

At sea en route to Yokohama

After the high of yesterday's visit to Torishima, many thought today's cruise through the Izu Islands would be something of an anti-climax especially as gale force winds were forecast. Fortunately weather remained mostly sunny despite the steadily rising wind, which soon had the sea in a frenzy of crashing whitecaps – by far the largest seas we had seen. The waves crashing past the restaurant windows at lunch made for amusing entertainment as *Heritage Adventurer* rode comfortably and, apart from a few lurches here and there, we barely noticed the increased motion.

The early morning was characterised by several lost land-birds along with a Cattle Egret that visited the ship yesterday morning. A Black-crowned Night-heron circled the ship, calling, while a Barn Swallow and an Eyebrowed Thrush briefly landed on the ship. After that excitement, there was a steady passage of Streaked Shearwaters, and their numbers grew ever greater as we approached the islands. By the time we reached Miyake-Jima there were rafts of Shearwaters dotted across the tumultuous ocean.

The ship's officers skillfully navigated the ship close to a spectacular series of rock stacks off the island where Japanese Murrelets breed, but we were not very optimistic to spot the birds in the rough seas. The strong wind made observations tricky, and the first Murrelets were spotted from the shelter of the observation lounge. Then, as we approached the lee of Niijima, we started seeing Murrelets on the water right next to the ship. It was amazing to see these tiny birds flying underwater in these wild waters. The ship also was visited by several Black-tailed Gulls – a particularly handsome species, with one even landing on the Bistro deck, presumably hoping for some chips! A pleasant surprise was the regular passage of

Short-tailed Albatrosses past the ship. It was a pleasure to see these large birds tossing around like Gadfly Petrels in the strong winds, and one was even buzzed by a Peregrine from the nearby island.

For those who had enough of the wind, Rod gave a lecture on rewilding a garden to attract wildlife. Then it was time for the Captain's farewell reception and dinner, after which the expedition slideshow was shown in the main lounge.



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Day 29

Monday, 17 April

Arriving in Yokohama

It was an early start for those wanting to witness *Heritage Adventurer's* arrival in Yokohama. With dawn before 0500, many were up to see if they could squeeze a few last birds from the trip as we were overtaken by a procession of ships entering Tokyo Bay. Black-headed Gulls and Large-billed Crows accompanied our passage, and we docked at 0700. Then it was the time for fond farewells as we said goodbye to our many friends, old and new, and departed on our next adventures.



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