

# **WildWings WESTERN PACIFIC ODYSSEY 2020 & 2021**

## Planned Itinerary (issued HE 24/7/2019)

Known in birding circles simply as the 'WPO', this expedition incorporates many of the key birding areas in the South West Pacific. First offered in 2007, it is now considered one of the 'must do' expeditions for any birder because of its opportunities to see some of the rarest pelagic seabirds in the world, plus many island endemics. But it is not just for 'birders'. The cetacean list can only be described as outstanding.

After departing the Port of Tauranga in New Zealand, we sail for the rich waters of the Hauraki Gulf where there are numerous speciality seabirds, including the recently discovered New Zealand Storm-petrel. From there it's northward to Norfolk Island. Next stop is New Caledonia where we search for the amazing Kagu and other endemic bird species in the Parc Provincial de la Rivière Bleue.

We then spend six exciting days in the Solomon Islands birding on Nendö, Santa Ana, Makira, Guadalcanal (Mt Austin), Tetepare and Kolombangara, before cruising across the New Britain Trench, an area known to be extremely rich in cetaceans. As we sail along the coasts of Bougainville and New Ireland, we will look for two rarely seen seabirds: Heinroth's Shearwater and the critically endangered Beck's Petrel which was only rediscovered in 2007, both of which we have seen on almost all our previous expeditions in this region.

Next stop is Truk Island (Federated States of Micronesia) for some more intensive birding. We will then set a course for the Bonin Islands south of Japan; our route will take us to Chichi-jima, the largest island in the archipelago. We will then continue north to Torishima Island (where we hope to get great views of the Short-tailed Albatross) before we arrive at to our last island destination of the voyage, Hachijō-jima, where we will look for the last specialities of the expedition.

Our voyage will then conclude at the Port of Yokohama in Japan. This expedition is accompanied by some of the best pelagic birding guides in the world who have extensive experience of the seabirds of the West Pacific and have visited the islands we will be landing on multiple times. Birding starts at dawn and finishes at sundown. Our guides are there throughout the day to assist you and the 'reading of the bird list' each evening is legendary for its detail and discussion. This is one expedition you can't afford to miss.

## ITINERARY

### **Day 1: Tauranga, New Zealand**

Make your way to a central city meeting point (reporting times and the departure time of the transfer will be confirmed with your voyage documents). The township of Tauranga is situated on the east coast of the North Island in the Bay of Plenty. The bay was given its name by Captain James Cook while circumnavigating New Zealand in 1769, when he was impressed by the region's welcoming people and abundant resources. Nothing has changed.

The captain and expedition team will be waiting to greet you on arrival and show you to your cabin. You will then have the opportunity to unpack before exploring the ship and meeting the other expeditioners. After formal introductions to the team, followed by safety briefings, we plan to sail in the late afternoon.

### **Day 2: Hauraki Gulf**

We arrive early morning in the Hauraki Gulf and plan to start the day near the Mokohinau Islands looking for Grey Ternlets which are regularly present here. Other birds that we might encounter include Buller's Shearwaters, Australian Gannets, and possibly Little Blue Penguins. Later in morning we will go to an area where previously we have had considerable success with finding the critically endangered New Zealand Storm-petrel and we will possibly chum or use fish oil to attract these birds. Other species that we might see in the vicinity include White-faced Storm-petrel, Grey-faced Petrel, Little Shearwater and Black Petrel. This evening as we cruise up the east coast of the North Island, we will undoubtedly be accompanied by some Albatrosses with the possibilities including Campbell, Shy, Buller's and Wandering.

### **Days 3 to 4: At Sea**

Heading north to Norfolk Island, we will take the opportunity to offer some lectures or presentations on seabird identification as well as briefings on what we can reasonably expect to see once ashore on Norfolk Island. Species that have been encountered on this leg previously include Grey-faced, Black-winged, Kermadec and White-necked Petrels. Both Wedge-tailed and Short-tailed Shearwaters, as well as White-bellied and White-faced Storm-petrels, and White Terns and Red-tailed Tropicbirds have been recorded here.

### **Day 5: Norfolk Island**

Before, or as we land here we will have to clear Australian Customs. (Please check whether you require an Australian visa as otherwise you might have to spend the day aboard.) Norfolk Island was a former Penal Colony and the island has been significantly modified, however, there are still some areas of forest and that is where we will visit. The four species we are keen to locate are the endemic Norfolk Island Parakeet, Slender-billed White-eye, Norfolk Robin and Norfolk Gerygone. Sadly the White-bellied White-eye appears to have followed several other endemics and is now considered to be extinct. Other birds recorded here include the Pacific Emerald Dove and Grey Fantail.

By mid-afternoon, we will say farewell to Norfolk and begin cruising north. The birding will continue from the ship and we will be on the look out for White-bellied Storm-petrel, Providence Petrel and Little Shearwater – all species we have seen previously in these waters.

### **Day 6: At Sea**

It should be good 'birding' today especially for petrels which could include Tahiti, Collared, White-necked, Providence and Kermadec Petrels.

### **Day 7: New Caledonia**

This small and tropical island has been described as a taste of France in the Pacific, where Melanesian traditions blend with French sophistication. New Caledonia is a fragment of the ancient supercontinent of Gondwana, and it is believed that New Caledonia detached and became an island tens of millions of years ago. It is this isolation which explains both the extent of biodiversity and the incredible levels of endemism on this delightful tropical island.

We plan to arrive at Nouméa in the early morning; as soon as the ship is cleared we will set off for the Parc Provincial de la Rivière Bleue. This reserve is home to the unique Kagu, we hope to get good views of this extraordinary bird as well as many other endemics and localised species. These could include New Caledonian (Goliath) Imperial-pigeon, Cloven-feathered Dove, New Caledonian (White-bellied) Goshawk, New Caledonian and Horned Parakeets, New Caledonian Myzomela, New Caledonian Whistler, New Caledonian Crow, New Caledonian Cuckooshrike, New Caledonian Friarbird, Crow and Barred Honeyeaters, Yellow-bellied Robin, Green-backed White-eye and Red-throated Parrotfinch.

### **Day 8: New Caledonia and At Sea**

After a night at the wharf in Nouméa, we plan to leave the ship well before dawn in order to arrive on the forested slopes of Mount Koghi prior to first light. Several specialities are generally easier to find here than at Parc Provincial de la Rivière Bleue and we will be looking for New Caledonian Goshawk, South Melanesian Cuckooshrike, Streaked Fantail, Southern Shrikebill, New Caledonian Crow and New Caledonian Grassbird as well as Striated Starling and Metallic Pigeon, before returning to the ship for a late morning departure.

We plan to sail around the southern tip of New Caledonia and amongst the species we will be looking for is the 'New Caledonian Storm-petrel'. This intriguing bird was first found on the WPO expedition in 2008 and has been seen several times since. Although seemingly closely related to New Zealand Storm-petrel, there are a number of important differences and it is now considered that this is a long-lost species which was collected in Samoa more than 200 years ago, and has not been seen since!

## **Days 9 to 10: At Sea**

As we head north from New Caledonia, new seabirds could include Polynesian Storm-petrel, Tropical Shearwater, Providence Petrel, Vanuatu Petrel, Collared Petrel and Tahiti Petrel. Our route should also take us relatively close to the area where in 2019 we saw several individuals of a mysterious petrel dubbed the 'Heritage Lava Petrel' which has so far defied identification.

This is also time to catch up with diaries, checklists and downloading of photos.

## **Day 11: Nendö – Temotu Province**

Nendö is the largest of the Santa Cruz Islands, which lie to the south-east of the Solomon Islands. The Spanish navigator Álvaro de Mendaña de Neira unsuccessfully tried to establish a colony here in 1595. Biologically these islands share more in common with Vanuatu. The Temotu Province offers a historical and culturally unique history, with practices such as red feather money, sourced from the Scarlet Honeyeater.

The remote island of Nendö is home to several localised endemics and during our time ashore we hope to find Temotu Whistler, Sanford's White-eye and Santa Cruz White-eye. Other possibilities include Red-bellied Fruit-dove, Pacific Imperial-pigeon and Cardinal Myzomela.

## **Day 12: Santa Ana, Solomon Islands**

Santa Ana, also known as Owaraha or Owa Raha, is a relatively small coral island which was first sighted by Europeans in 1568. Located just a few miles offshore from Makira Island, Santa Ana is one of the most easterly of the main islands in the Solomon Islands archipelago.

Santa Ana has a distinctive avifauna so we can expect to find an interesting mixture of birds including small island species such as Silver-capped Fruit-dove mixed with some of the Makiran endemics like White-headed Fruit-dove, Sooty Myzomela, Makira Honeyeater, Makira Flycatcher and White-collared Monarch. Santa Ana is also home to an endemic and highly distinctive subspecies of Rufous Fantail and we will also be looking for Sanford's (Solomon) Sea-eagle and Oriole Whistler.

## **Day 13: Anuta Island in the Makira Group**

Makira Island is located in the eastern Solomons. It is the most easterly of the main islands in the archipelago. Anuta is a small inshore island on the western side. We anchor close to Anuta and local guides escort us along a disused forestry road that winds up and inland where there is still some decent forest. Here we can expect to see an exciting range of new species including many which are either endemic to Makira or otherwise only occur on a few other islands. These could include White-headed Fruit-dove, Chestnut-bellied Imperial-pigeon, Makira Honeyeater (San Cristobal Melidectes), San Cristobal Starling, Makira Flycatcher, Makira Cicadabird, White-collared Monarch, Sooty Myzomela and Mottled Flowerpecker. Other species could include Red-knobbed and Island Imperial-pigeon, Brahminy Kite, Pied Goshawk, Pacific Baza and Sanford's (Solomon) Sea-eagle.

Before departing we will enjoy the local hospitality in nearby Anuta Village, where the people are welcoming and the children are inquisitive.

#### **Day 14: Honiara**

We will anchor off Honiara. It is an early morning departure from the ship to rendezvous with a fleet of 4WD vehicles to take us to nearby Mt Austin. The birding is quite exceptional here (it is a well known 'birding' spot) and there is the potential for a good list of endemics and other localised specialities. These could include Ultramarine Kingfisher, Yellow-eyed, White-bellied and Solomons Cuckooshrikes, Common Cicadabird, Chestnut-bellied and Black-and-white Monarch, Steel-blue Flycatcher, Midget Flowerpecker, Brown-winged and Singing Starling, Yellow-faced Myna, Olive-backed Sunbird and the Black-headed Myzomela. There should also be numbers of parrots and pigeons including the Cardinal and Yellow-bibbed Lory, Singing and Eclectus Parrot, Finsch's Pygmy Parrot, Ducorps' Cockatoo, Mackinlay's Cuckoo Dove, Red-knobbed Imperial-pigeon and Claret-breasted and Superb Fruit-doves.

#### **Day 15: Tetepare Island**

Located in the New Georgia group of islands, Tetepare is an excellent example of a community conservation project as the entire island has been set aside as a community run reserve. Long and rugged, this island is cloaked in lush tropical forests and fringed with reefs that are teeming with marine life; it is the largest uninhabited tropical island in the Southern Hemisphere.

There are a number of new Solomon endemics to look for here including the highly localised Dark-eyed White-eye. Other possibilities include Melanesian Scrubfowl, Claret-breasted Fruit-dove, Island Imperial-pigeon, Buff-headed Coucal, Crimson-rumped Myzomela, Cockerell's Fantail, Kolombangara Monarch and, if we are extremely fortunate, both Nicobar Pigeon and the extremely poorly known Solomons Nightjar.

#### **Day 16: Kolombangara Island**

Kolombangara is a dormant or semi-extinct volcano, 1,800 metres high and last active probably about 10,000 years ago. We plan to land at the settlement of Ringi Cove and gain some altitude as we head up into the hills to the Imbu Rano Conservation Area. This conservation reserve was set aside by the elders of the island who decided that logging of indigenous forests would cease 400 metres above sea level. Below the 400 metres mark a sustainable forestry industry of exotic timbers has been established growing mainly teak and eucalyptus. The lodge at the gateway to the reserve provides an uninterrupted view of the enormous forested crater of the Kolombangara volcano. Birdlife will be plentiful and we hope to see the spectacular Sanford's (Solomon) Sea-eagle, Cardinal, Duchess and Meek's Lorikeets, Kolombangara and White-capped Monarchs, Crimson-rumped Myzomela, Ducorps' Cockatoo and Metallic and Singing Starling. We may also have an opportunity to look for the elusive Roviana Rail as we leave the reserve.

On past voyages we have encountered cetaceans as we sail these waters over the New Britain Trench, so all eyes will be scanning the seas for the tell-tale signs of whale blows and leaping dolphins. Birders will also want to keep a lookout for the Heinroth's Shearwater which also patrols this area.

We complete customs formalities here prior to departing the Solomon Islands tonight.

### **Day 17: Off the coast of Bougainville**

We are at sea today and our target bird is Heinroth's Shearwater if we haven't already seen it. Our course takes us up the coast of Bougainville before crossing a deep water canyon known as the New Britain Trench. This area has proved very productive for cetaceans on previous voyages and the species we have seen include Sperm Whale, False Killer Whale, Fraser's Dolphin and both Dwarf and Pygmy Sperm Whales.

### **Day 18: Off the coast of New Ireland**

Our target bird today is the critically endangered and poorly known Beck's Petrel. We begin chumming at day-break in an area where we have found these birds on previous occasions. This area is also one where we have previously found Heinroth's Shearwater, so we will also be on the lookout for this very localised species. This is another area where a number of different species of cetaceans have been seen previously including Melon-headed Whale and Dwarf and Pygmy Sperm Whales.

### **Days 19 to 20: At Sea**

Lazy and relaxing days at sea, you can bird (under a special shade area on the top deck) download photos, write logs or notes, or simply relax in the bar with a drink or a book. Our team will be maintaining a constant pelagic watch for birds and mammals and you are welcome to join them. There are a number of species including Bulwer's Petrels, Wedge-tailed Shearwaters, White-tailed Tropicbirds, White and Sooty Terns and both Great and Lesser Frigatebirds that we could see and photograph.

### **Days 21 to 22: Caroline Islands**

We will enter the protected (and historic) waters of the Chuuk (Truk) Lagoon late this afternoon. Once we are clear of Customs, and if there is time after clearance has been given, you are welcome to go ashore and enjoy an evening of birding or a quiet stroll through town.

We will (weather permitting) offer a couple of options for birding on day 22. On Weno Island where the ship will be berthed, you can walk around and there is a good chance we can see species such as Purple-capped Fruit-dove, Oceanic Flycatcher, Caroline Reed Warbler, Caroline Islands Swiftlet, Caroline Islands White-eye, Micronesian Myzomela and Micronesian Starling.

The other option will be to take a long Zodiac ride to Tol South Island where after a very demanding climb (especially in the heat and humidity of these islands) there is a reasonable chance of seeing the endemic Teardrop (or Great Truk) White-eye and Chuuk Monarch.

If birding is not for you today, we can arrange a snorkel in this historic harbour where there are countless Japanese ships and aircraft. These were sunk by the Americans in a surprise attack on 17th February 1944.

We continue north this afternoon.

### **Days 23 to 26: At Sea**

More lazy relaxing days at sea. Just remember 'God does not deduct from one's allotted life span time spent sailing' so just relax and enjoy. The birding is quiet in these latitudes, but if you put in the time there are some good sightings to be had. Birds that we may see include Matsudaira's Storm-petrels, Bonin and Bulwer's Petrels, Wedge-tailed and Bannerman's Shearwaters.

As we approach the Bonin chain of islands we will keep a particular lookout for the newly described Bryan's Shearwater. This area is also good for cetaceans, especially Humpback Whales which are known to occur here in reasonable numbers.

### **Day 27: Chichi-jima Island**

We will clear Customs and Immigration into Japan at the largest of the Bonin Islands, Chichi-jima, before exploring the settlement and the surrounding area. Birds that we may see include Japanese Bush Warbler, Blue Rock Thrush, Brown-eared Bulbul and Japanese White-eye.

We will, however, only have a limited time ashore as we need to reposition the ship off the eastern side of the island by mid-afternoon to look for the critically endangered Bryan's Shearwater. This species is only known to breed on a small islet off Chichi-jima and during our 2019 expedition several individuals were seen as birds returned to their burrows prior to dusk. We should also see good numbers of Bannerman's Shearwaters which also breed here.

### **Day 28: At Sea**

Relax at sea as we sail north from the Bonin Islands. We will be on the lookout for seabirds with the possibilities including Tristram's Storm-petrel, Bonin Petrel and Bannerman's Shearwater.

### **Day 29: Torishima Island**

Landings are not permitted at Torishima Island, but we cruise as close to shore as the captain will permit in the hope of seeing the Short-tailed or Steller's Albatross. Chumming will begin early morning and will continue for as long as it takes to bring the birds around. Other species that could be attracted include Black-footed and Laysan Albatrosses, Streaked Shearwater, and both Tristram's and Matsudaira's Storm-petrels.

### **Day 30: Hachijō-jima Island**

Located in the Izu Islands archipelago, Hachijō-jima is a picturesque subtropical volcanic island. The island's two main mountains are the volcanoes Mt Mihara in the south-east and Mt Nishi in the north-west. The island is a major exporter of Phoenix roebelenii palms and also cultivates aloe vera, so you may pass numerous plantations of both.

The island is home to the endemic Izu Thrush, Ijima's Leaf-warbler and Owston's Tit. We will also look for Japanese Wood Pigeon, Japanese Pygmy Woodpecker and Japanese (Izu) Robin. We will end our birding on the expedition by sailing close to some islets where we hope to find Japanese Murrelet.

This evening we enjoy a final dinner on board Spirit of Enderby, and prepare for our morning arrival tomorrow at the Port of Yokohama.

### **Day 31: Yokohama, Japan**

After breakfast and arrival formalities have been completed in to Yokohama, we will disembark the vessel. There will be a complimentary transfer from the ship to Yokohama railway station.

We ask you not to book any onward flights (Domestic or International) until mid afternoon to account for any delays and the time it takes to travel to the airports.

*Note: During our voyage, circumstances may make it necessary or desirable to deviate from the proposed itinerary. This can include poor weather and opportunities for making unplanned excursions. Your Expedition Leader will keep you fully informed.*

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