

Trip Log
Voyage # 2663a
Galapagos of the Southern Ocean
17th - 29th December 2009



Heritage Expeditions

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Day 1: 17 December 2009
Invercargill

The introduction to our expedition began with an informal buffet dinner at the Kelvin Hotel in Invercargill, where we met and mingled with some of our expedition staff and fellow passengers. Our expedition leader, Nathan, introduced us to Marie (hotel manager), Adam (lecturer) and Anne (guide, who works mostly in operations in the Heritage Expeditions office in Christchurch). There was a definite air of excitement in the room as we discussed the coming expedition; the possible weather conditions, which did not look good at this stage; and the islands we were to visit.

Day 2: Friday, 18 December 2009
Depart from Bluff Harbour, Invercargill, bound for the Snares

A warm, blustery day greeted us as we went through the compulsory baggage security check just after 8:30 a.m. With that formality completed, we were free to explore Invercargill until lunchtime, with some choosing to walk to the Southland Museum with Anne. At the museum, we viewed the very informative Roaring '40s exhibition. Lindsay, who heads the Tuatara exhibition at the museum, gave a very good talk that culminated with a Tuatara for us to touch. It had very soft skin and was not at all cold. Tuataras from this breeding programme go to zoos and sanctuaries all over the world, and Lindsay was justifiably proud of what has been achieved by the programme.

At 11:30 a.m., we reconvened at the Kelvin for lunch, and after a head count at 12:15 p.m., we boarded the bus bound for Bluff and the "Spirit of Enderby." There was a slight delay when we arrived at the port while a port officer boarded the bus and checked our IDs against his passenger list. After boarding the vessel, we had an hour before the ship departed the port. During that time, we settled into our cabins, cleared customs and explored the vessel. The pilot came on board, the lines were cleared, and at 3:00 p.m., we gently cruised out of Bluff Harbour. Nathan held a compulsory briefing where we were introduced to the staff, given a run down on how things worked on board ship and went through a comprehensive safety briefing. A short time after the meeting, the alarm sounded for our compulsory lifeboat drill, where we put into practice what Nathan had explained earlier. That done, most people stayed on deck photographing the bird life and watching Stewart Island slip by in the late evening light. Adam gave a very interesting lecture on the Snares, and finally we sat down to dinner, had a bit of a chat in the bar and then were off to bed.

Wildlife observed: Southern Royal Albatross, Auckland White Capped (Shy) Albatross, Salvins Albatross, Bullers Albatross, Northern Giant Petrel, Cook's Petrel, Snares Pintado (Cape) Petrel, White-chinned Petrel, Sooty Shearwater, Common Diving Petrel, Bronze (Stewart Island) Shag, Southern Black Backed (Kelp) Gull, Red-billed Gull, White-fronted tern



Day 3: Saturday, 19 December 2009
The Snares

During the night, we arrived at the Snares and were woken at 6:45 a.m. to our first sight of this rocky series of islands. The weather was not the best for landing. Although it was not raining, there was a lumpy swell running, and it was predicted to get worse. Finally the call came to collect gear, don a lifejacket, turn your tag, and line up by the gangway. We managed to get about three people into the first zodiac before the captain aborted the trip due to worsening weather—we might have been able to get everyone away, but by the time they returned, it may have been impossible to get them back onto the vessel. The wet condition of the people who returned to the vessel confirmed this emphatically. Nathan told everyone not to be too disappointed, as we would make another attempt on our return to Port of Bluff.

Once everyone was back on board, the captain cruised the length of the main Snares Island, and from the deck we were able to see many different birds, as well as Snares Crested penguins swimming in little flotillas right next to the vessel and also congregating on the penguin slide. After the run up and down the island, we set sail for Enderby Island, planning to reach there in the wee hours of the morning. As we headed south, we passed Clipper Odyssey heading the other way. She was rolling a bit, and perhaps our vessel was tossing about like that, too!

Wildlife observed: Snares Crested Penguin, Gibson's Wandering Albatross, Southern Royal Albatross, Campbell Albatross, Auckland White-capped (Shy) Albatross, Salvins Albatross, Buller's Albatross, Northern Giant Petrel, Southern Giant Petrel, Snares Pintado (Cape) Petrel, Mottled Petrel, White-chinned Petrel, Sooty Shearwater, Antarctic Prion, (possible sightings of) Fairy Prion and Fulmar Prion, Black-bellied Storm Petrel, Common Diving Petrel, Brown Skua, Southern Black Backed (Kelp) gull, Antarctic Tern, New Zealand Fur Seal



Day 4: Sunday, 20 December 2009
Auckland Islands

Woken by the breakfast call, we emerged from our cabins to find Enderby Island on port side. The wind was up and conditions looked marginal, with a long line of white surf outlining the beach and waves hurling themselves up the cliffs. Nathan and Adam launched a zodiac and headed for shore to see if a landing was possible. They returned soaking wet from the spray that whipped up by the wind and with the news that the surf was running too high to attempt a landing. Enderby Island was off the itinerary for this day, but Nathan and the Captain thought we might be able to find better conditions further down the main island at Carnley Harbour.

Unfortunately, when we arrived there the wind was up to 65 knots, and the captain estimated it was 100 knots across

the entry to Carnley Harbour. This was not a good condition for entering a narrow channel broadside to the waves (the view from the top deck was spectacularly wild). Nathan and the Captain decided to turn around and head back to the shelter of Port Ross. As we did so, a number of people stayed on deck or on the bridge photographing and watching the Southern Ocean perform.

Shortly after we arrived in Port Ross, and into much calmer water, the zodiacs were launched, and everyone was ferried ashore at Hardwicke, meeting the resident sea lion as we landed. He was most inquisitive and obviously had never heard of the five-metre rule, checking out each landing party quite thoroughly. In glorious sunshine, we walked along the boardwalk to visit the Hardwicke cemetery, taking time to admire the rata forest and dracophyllum along the way. Then Nathan led us along the shoreline and into the forest to the Victoria Tree: the remains of a huge rata tree with the date, time, name and provenance of an Australian government ship that called at the island in 1865 in search of castaways. With the facts and figures from Adam's lecture on Auckland Islands in our heads, it was not difficult to imagine what a tough time the early settlers and any castaways must have had. The graves of two babies in the cemetery reinforced that feeling.

The sun was out, everyone was very happy with the opportunity to be ashore and stretch their legs. With cameras clicking, we stayed and explored the area until 5:00 p.m, before being ferried back to the vessel. It was a wonderful, though cold, evening. The wind had dropped, and there was lovely blue sky, which boded well for another chance at Enderby Island on Monday.

Wildlife observed: Yellow-eyed penguin, Gibson's Wandering Albatross, Southern Royal Albatross, Auckland White-capped (Shy) Albatross, Salvin's Albatross, Light-mantled Sooty Albatross, Northern Giant Petrel, Snares Pintado (Cape) Petrel, White-headed Petrel, White-chinned Petrel, Sooty Shearwater, Hutton's Shearwater, Antarctic Prion, possible sightings of Fairy and Fulmar Prions, Grey-backed Storm Petrel, Common Diving Petrel, Auckland Island Shag, Mallard, Brown Skua, Southern Black Backed (Kelp) Gull, Red-billed Gull, White-fronted tern, Antarctic Tern, Auckland Island Tomtit, Blackbird, Bellbird, Tui, Silvereeye, Redpoll, New Zealand Fur seal, New Zealand Hooker's Sea Lion



Day 5: Monday, 21 December 2009 Enderby Island

We awoke to the news that conditions were perfect for landing on Enderby Island. After a briefing on what to expect on Enderby and the safety rules, we packed our gear, lunch and cameras. Then we all lined up for boarding the zodiacs for the trip ashore. The staff went ashore first to set up a station amongst the grass and tussocks above our chosen landing site. We said goodbye to Eric, who would be part of the sea lion team on the island for the next month. Landing was nose in onto a rocky platform, swing your legs over the prow of the zodiac, watch out for the slippery kelp, and then along the rock shelf and up to the landing station. Once we arrived, two yellow-eyed penguins greeted us as they watched us with great curiosity. Even keeping the regulation five-metre distance, we managed to get some good close-up photographs. Our Expedition Leader, Nathan, introduced (another) Nathan, from the sea lion research team, who was a resident on the island. The (second) Nathan explained what the team was doing on the island and how the research/monitoring programme worked.

Nathan then led us through the tussocks and down along the top of Sandy Beach, which already had a reasonable-sized sea lion colony. There were some very large males roaring, posturing and fighting to keep hold of their harems; some very pretty blonde females; and a number of pups. It was a hive of activity despite it being early in the breeding season. It was difficult to turn away, but halfway down the beach, we headed up the hill, into the rata forest and then along the boardwalk to the cliffs on the far side of the island.

Here we split into three groups. Rod and Adam took the two groups that wanted to explore the cliffs and then return to Sandy Beach. Our Expedition Leader, Nathan, led the third group that wanted to walk around the island, with Pete, Anne and Andris bringing up the rear. The walk was wonderful and well-worth doing. There were plenty of skua flying overhead, spectacular cliffs, lots of dotterels underfoot, and some walkers were also lucky enough to see snipe (and a snipe chick).

The mega herbs put on a real display for us with *Anisotome Latifolia* and *Bulbinella Rossii* being the most prominent. The hills were beautifully covered in yellow and purple blooms interspersed with a mossy green carpet dotted with tiny white Enderby Island Gentians. With so much to see and photograph, it is no wonder that the walkers soon became well strung out with the tail enders having arrived at the landing station just in time to board the zodiac for the vessel. A few of the walkers did not manage to visit the Sandy Bay sea lion colony again or the Stella castaway hut in the rata forest (Adam and Rod's group spent an afternoon there along with the faster walkers), but this was more than made up for by marvellous sightings and photographs of snipe, dotterels, skua, Auckland Island shag, Auckland Island teal, red crowned parakeet and the gorgeous silver trunks of the rata forest (only just beginning to flower but beautiful with its twisted, sculptured trunks and wind-carved canopy). Some feisty sea lions even roared at us! It was a fabulously full day on the island, and quite a few people did not want to leave it. Dinner and debrief awaited us on the vessel, so we reluctantly boarded the zodiacs—which was an adventure in itself off the slippery rock shelf—and we were ferried back to the vessel. Because of the calm conditions, making our way out of the zodiac and up the gangway onto the vessel was easy. Once our boots were cleaned, tags were turned, and gear was stowed, we were free to relax for the evening, while the captain got the ship underway and headed for Macquarie Island.

Wildlife observed: Yellow-eyed penguin, Gibson's Wandering Albatross, Southern Royal Albatross, (possible sightings of) Campbell and Black-browed Albatross, Auckland White-capped (Shy) Albatross, Light-mantled Sooty Albatross, Northern Giant Petrel, Snares Pintado (Cape) Petrel, White-headed Petrel, White-chinned Petrel, Sooty Shearwater, Antarctic Prion, Grey-backed storm Petrel, Black-bellied Storm Petrel, Common Diving Petrel, Auckland Island Shag, Mallard, Auckland Island Flightless Teal, New Zealand Falcon, Auckland Island Banded Dotterel, Subantarctic Snipe, Brown Skua, Southern Black-baked (Kelp) Gull, Red-billed Gull, White-fronted Tern, Antarctic Tern, Red-crowned Parakeet, Auckland Island Tomtit, Blackbird, Auckland Island Pipit, Bellbird, Tui, Silvereye, Redpoll, New Zealand Fur Seal, New Zealand Hooker's Sea Lion



Day 6: Tuesday, 22 December 2009
En route to Macquarie Island

It was a full day at sea heading for Macquarie Island, but that did not mean nothing was happening. In the morning, Nathan led a recap of our day on Enderby Island, and Rod Morris gave a very interesting talk called "Wildlife Photography – What's it all about?" illustrated with excellent photographs. In the afternoon, the documentary "Beyond the Roaring Forties" was screened, and just after that, Adam gave us an introduction to Macquarie Island. A number of people took advantage of the open-bridge policy and spent quite some time watching and photographing the albatrosses, prions and terns that soared around the vessel. Downloading and studying photographs was another popular activity. The day just flew by, ending with another wonderful dinner prepared by Nicky and her team in the kitchen.

Wildlife observed: Gibson's Wandering Albatross, Southern Royal Albatross, Wandering Albatross, Campbell Albatross, Black-browed Albatross, Grey-headed Albatross, Auckland White-capped (Shy) Albatross, Light-mantled Sooty Albatross, Northern Giant Petrel, Snares Pintado (Cape) Petrel, Mottled Petrel, White-headed Petrel, Black-bellied Storm Petrel, New Zealand Fur Seal



Day 7: Wednesday, 23 December 2009
Macquarie Island

The day did not start exactly as planned. Rough weather and strong winds meant we could not get ashore at Buckles Bay to pick up the TASPAWS Rangers in the morning. We could see the base through the rain, including a large iceberg on the far side of the isthmus, but we could not get ashore. We had an alternate plan of cruising the vessel down the coast of the island, seeing what we could see from the deck and hoping the seas would calm. Macquarie Island is long and skinny, and we cruised down the eastern side as far as Lusitania Bay. The squally weather calmed a bit, and we could see the penguin colonies clearly. Lusitania Bay and Sandy Beach were covered in penguins and elephant seals. Andris Apse gave a talk on landscape/wildlife photography backed up by his wonderful photographs, many of which were taken in the Subantarctic Islands during previous visits.

By lunchtime the weather improved, so we headed back to the Macquarie Island base, picked up the rangers and retraced our steps to Sandy Beach. On the way, the rangers briefed us on what to expect on the beach and how to behave around the wildlife (walk as slow as a penguin and respect their right of way). Everyone was ready when the call came to board the zodiac, as our appetites had been whetted by the morning's cruise and by the briefing. Once ashore, with the rangers guiding us, we were free to wander and photograph at will. The wildlife was amazing; the beach and the gullies leading up to the main rookeries were packed with royal and king penguins all intermingled with elephant seals, skuas and giant petrels. Such a feast for the eyes and a cacophony of sound for the ears, it was difficult to know where to look or point the camera first.

Because we had been late getting ashore, dinner was postponed until 9:00 p.m. Nathan gave us extra time on land well into the evening, and we certainly made the most of it. The elephant seals snorted and roared and sparred for position, rearing up for a few minutes of furious fighting, then subsiding with a loud snort into a blubbery heap on the sand to rest for a few minutes before starting all over again. The penguins were constantly coming and going from the sea to the shore and were quite unfazed by all the aliens on their beach. In fact, quite a few of them were so curious that they came way too close for telephoto lenses, and they obviously had no concept of the five-metre rule. We saw penguins jostling for position, calling to mates, feeding chicks, surfing the waves, paddling about in rafts of five to 20, porpoising out of the water or just sacked out on the sand. When the time came to return to the vessel, there were very few takers for the first zodiac back. Eventually, we all had to reluctantly leave this amazing, magical place. Back on board, it was a very lively dinnertime with swapping of stories and photographs, and there was a champagne shout from one of the passengers who had ticked off her 700th Australian bird. It was a great day topped off with a sighting of orca patrolling the beach in the hopes of a penguin dinner.

Wildlife observed: King Penguin, Gentoo Penguin, Royal Penguin, Gibson's Wandering Albatross, Wandering Albatross, Southern Royal Albatross, Black-browed Albatross, Grey-headed Albatross, Auckland White-capped (Shy) Albatross, Light-mantled Sooty Albatross, Northern Giant Petrel, Southern Giant Petrel, Pintado (Cape) Petrel, Soft-plumaged Petrel, Antarctic Prion, Macquarie Island Shag, Brown Skua, Southern Black Backed (Kelp) Gull, Antarctic Tern, European Starling, Killer Whale, Southern Elephant Seal



**Day 8: Thursday, 24 December 2009, Christmas Eve
Macquarie Island**

We spent the night at anchor in the calm waters of Sandy Beach. During breakfast, we set off for Buckles Bay and the Macquarie Island Station. The rangers met us on the beach, and we were split into four groups as the rangers led us on a guided tour of the base and its surrounding environs. The iceberg that had been grounded yesterday was gone, but there was another one on the horizon that made an interesting backdrop as we explored. Marie took our passports ashore to be stamped with the Macquarie Island stamp—proof that we had been ashore on this wonderful island. The rangers looked after us well, right down to tea/coffee with scones, jam and cream in the mess, where they were preparing for their Christmas celebrations. This was a different experience, compared to yesterday, with emphasis on the historical and current activities of the base. We still saw plenty of wildlife, including elephant seals, king penguins, gentoos, giant petrels and even a redpoll.

All too soon, after thanking the TASPAWS staff and wishing them a Merry Christmas, we boarded the zodiacs and headed back to the ship for a late lunch. During the return, Nathan and Adam took us on a detour to see the Rockhopper penguin colony on the rocks just round the corner from the base. The Rockhoppers are the most comical looking of all the penguins, and we were able to get quite close to the colony to observe their antics. Once back on board, while we all reminisced over lunch in the dining room, the captain readied the ship and we departed for Campbell Island.

When we initially came aboard the “Spirit of Enderby,” there were information booklets in our cabins covering the New Zealand Subantarctics and Macquarie Island. The two days we spent exploring Macquarie, the very knowledgeable TASPAWS Rangers, as well as Adam’s pre-arrival lecture, really made the Macquarie Island booklets come alive. Packed with information on the unique geological formations, the history and the flora and fauna, the booklets were well worth a read and definitely added to our experience ashore of every island we visited.

Wildlife observed: King Penguin, Gentoo Penguin, Rockhopper Penguin, Royal Penguin, Gibson’s Wandering Albatross, Wandering Albatross, Southern Royal Albatross, Campbell Albatross, Black-browed Albatross, Grey-headed Albatross, Auckland White-capped (Shy) Albatross, Light-mantled Sooty Albatross, Northern Giant Petrel, Southern Giant Petrel, Pintado (Cape) Petrel, Snares Pintado (Cape) Petrel, Mottled Petrel, Antarctic Prion, Macquarie Island Shag, Grey Duck, Brown Skua, Southern Black Backed (Kelp) Gull, Antarctic Tern, Redpoll, European Starling, Southern Elephant Seal



Day 9: Friday, 25 December 2009, Christmas Day
En route to Campbell Island

At sea, in the middle of the Southern Ocean, on Christmas Day was a great way to spend this special day. Activities during the day included the usual bird watching from the decks and the bridge, plenty of opportunities for photography, a Christmas quiz (winning prize was a bottle of wine), and a Christmas sing along in the bar (thanks Erin for having brought your guitar). The Southern Ocean was performing by rocking and rolling as we made our way towards Campbell Island. Due to this, Nathan postponed Christmas dinner until we reached the calmer waters of Perseverance Harbour, Campbell Island.

Wildlife observed: Gibson's Wandering Albatross, Southern Royal Albatross, Northern Royal Albatross, Campbell Albatross, Grey-headed Albatross, Auckland White-capped (Shy) Albatross, Light-mantled Sooty Albatross, Northern Giant Petrel, Snares Pintado (Cape) Petrel, Mottled Petrel, White-headed Petrel, White-chinned Petrel, Sooty Shearwater, Antarctic Prion, Black-bellied Storm Petrel

Day 10: Saturday, 26 December 2009, Boxing Day
Campbell Island

Mid morning we sighted Jacquemart Island and the southern end of Campbell Island with its tussock-covered hills and tall, sea-sculptured cliffs. Soon, we were anchored in the calm waters of Perseverance Harbour just off Beeman Base. First we had lunch, then a briefing about Campbell Island, and finally the moment we had been waiting for, our trip ashore. Beeman Base has a very sheltered jetty, which made this the easiest landing of the expedition so far. No landing would be complete without a curious sea lion, and Campbell Island did not disappoint. This sea lion tried to disguise himself by nosing up to the surface in a camouflage of kelp, but the loud snort he made as he surfaced gave him away.

Once everyone was ashore, we followed the boardwalk past the buildings, around the base of Mt. Beeman and on up to Col Lyall, passing nesting pipits on the way. Almost at the top of the boardwalk there was a platform where we were allowed to leave the boardwalk and explore amongst the tussock, mega herbs and nesting Albatrosses. Although it was blowing a gale, that did not detract from the experience. It was wonderful to see the Albatross up close, sitting on their nests completely unfazed by the strange beings who observed them from the boardwalk or crouched down amongst the tussocks. The windy conditions allowed the Albatrosses to take off almost without effort; they just stood up, opened their wings and lifted off into the wind to soar easily above us. Those who fought the wind and continued up the boardwalk past the platform were rewarded by close ups of Albatrosses, fields of mega herbs, and great wild views from the cliffs. In addition, those who were patient enough saw nest changeovers, groups of youngsters gamming and adult pairs bonding and mutual grooming.

The last zodiac returned to the vessel at 8:00 p.m. There was time for a shower and change, then a quick chat in the bar before heading to the dining room for the much-anticipated delayed Christmas dinner. Nicky and her kitchen team had prepared a buffet meal that was sumptuous! It started with an anti-pasta platter for each table. Then there was a buffet of baked ham, roasted turkey, roast beef, wonderful salads and vegetables. The meal culminated in a dessert of croquembouche with strawberries, Christmas pudding, blueberries and pavlova. We ate far too much but still had room for Christmas mince tarts, passionfruit shortbread and chocolate fudge to finish. The majority of us retired to bed at about midnight. It was a wonderful day!

Wildlife observed: Gibson's Wandering Albatross, Southern Royal Albatross, Campbell Albatross, Grey-headed Albatross, Auckland White-capped (Shy) Albatross, Light-mantled Sooty Albatross, Northern Giant Petrel, Snares Pintado (Cape) Petrel, White-headed Petrel, White-chinned Petrel, Sooty Shearwater, Antarctic Prion, Grey-backed Storm Petrel, Black-bellied Storm Petrel, Campbell Island Shag, Campbell Island Flightless Teal, Brown Skua, Southern Black Backed (Kelp) Gull, Red-billed Gull, Antarctic Tern, Blackbird, Dunnock, Campbell Island Pipit, Silvereye, Redpoll, New Zealand Hooker's Sea Lion



Day 11: Sunday, 27 December 2009
En route to the Snares

During the night, the captain lifted the anchor and headed the vessel towards the Snares. With the weather forecast changing to favourable, we hoped for good launching conditions for a zodiac cruise upon arrival at the Snares. The sea was a bit calmer, and most people were on deck by mid morning observing and photographing the Albatrosses as they soared and hovered over the back deck, practically posing for the cameras. The sea was still a bit too rough for the lecture room, so the Macquarie Island and Campbell Island recap was held in the bar/library just before lunch.

Happy birthday to Tess; we celebrated with carrot cake at lunchtime and a rousing chorus of "Happy Birthday."

In the afternoon, the Enderby Trust Scholars gave a presentation, with each explaining what led them to the Subantarctic Islands, what they had gained from the expedition and their plans for after it. We enjoyed listening to their stories, and their enthusiasm for the Subantarctic Islands was encouraging and infectious. Later in the afternoon, Adam lectured on Albatrosses of the world. Then, suitably inspired, a number of us spent the time until dinner photographing albatrosses, petrels and terns off the back deck.

Wildlife observed: Gibson's Wandering Albatross, Southern Royal Albatross, Campbell Albatross, Auckland White-capped (Shy) Albatross, Salvin's Albatross, Northern Giant Petrel, Snares Pintado (Cape) Petrel, Mottled Petrel, White-chinned Petrel, Sooty Shearwater, Antarctic Prion, Grey-backed Storm Petrel, Black-bellied Storm Petrel



Day 12: Monday, 28 December 2009
The Snares

At last, we approached the Snares, with calm waters and a beautiful day. The Snares came on the horizon about 11:00 a.m., and we were on deck photographing the many birds that wheeled and dived about the ship. The MV Orion was scheduled to be at the Snares with a departure time of around noon. Nathan talked to their expedition leader, and they very kindly agreed to let us come in behind them, considering we missed out on our first try back at the start of the trip.

Marie split us into two groups. The first group cruised in three zodiacs, while the second group had lunch. At 2:00 p.m., the groups swapped places. Nathan, Adam and Pete drove the zodiacs and the closer we got to shore, the calmer the waters became. We were able to get very close with the wildlife and the kelp-fringed cliffs. What an amazing experience: there were literally thousands of Snares Crested Penguins lining the rocks and nooks and crannies along the shore, bobbing in rafts all around the zodiacs, porpoising out of the water and leaping up rock faces as they came ashore, all completely unfazed by us in our zodiacs. We cruised through archways, into caves, up narrow inlets and round small rocky islands, all the while spotting more and more aspects of life on the Snares. The flora was just

as fascinating as the fauna, with many trees and plants in full flower. We spotted tomtits flitting amongst the trees, fernbirds with their distinctive call, terns nesting, albatrosses nesting and courting on the cliffs, rafts of Cape Pigeons bobbing about in the kelp, and New Zealand fur seals cruising the waters or resting ashore in amongst the penguins.

Just when we thought it could not improve, we arrived at the penguin slide—a smooth rock face sloping uphill from sea to skyline and covered with Snares Crested Penguins. The slide was bustling and the absolute highlight of the trip as we nosed the zodiacs in against the kelp and just sat and watched (and photographed) the hive of activity in and around the rookery. Once again, no one wanted to leave when it was time to head back to the vessel, and we all buzzed with excitement when we met in the bar/library back on board. What a fantastic experience, and a big thank you to Nathan, Adam and Pete for zodiac driving for over six hours so we could all get a good look at the Snares.

After a few hours to catch our breath (and see Marie to pay our onboard accounts), Nathan called a meeting in the bar/library to outline disembarkation procedures for Tuesday. He also gave a recap, not just of the day, but the entire expedition. Then it was time for everyone to climb to the monkey deck for a group photo in the early evening light. The rest of the evening was spent either sorting photographs and exchanging stories or taking last-minute photographs in the hopes of the elusive perfect shot. The last meal together was beautifully prepared by Nicky and Glenn, and then a number of passengers banded together and gave a slide show of photographs taken during the expedition. With several professional photographers amongst the passengers and staff, there were more than a few of those elusive perfect shots shown. A late night rendezvous on the monkey deck watching Stewart Island slip by in the moonlight made a very fitting end to our last night aboard on this wonderful trip.

Wildlife observed: Snares Crested Penguin, Southern Royal Albatross, Campbell Albatross, Auckland White-capped (Shy) Albatross, Salvins Albatross, Bullers Albatross, Northern Giant Petrel, Snares Pintado (Cape) Petrel, Mottled Petrel, White-chinned Petrel, Sooty Shearwater, possible sightings of Fairy and Fulmar Prions, Common Diving Petrel, Brown Skua, Southern Black Backed (Kelp) Gull, Red-billed Gull, Antarctic Tern, Snares Island Tomtit, Snares Island Fernbird, Silvereye, Redpoll, New Zealand Fur Seal



Day 13: Tuesday, 29 December 2009
Bluff Harbour, Invercargill

We woke to find the vessel just off the pilot station in calm waters waiting for the pilot to board and take us to Port of Bluff and disembarkation.

Happy birthday to Asher; we celebrated with lamington cake and a candle that can't be blown out.

After an early morning breakfast and putting luggage out for the crew to organise, the pilot came on board, and then the ship was underway and headed for Bluff. It was lovely and sunny on deck as we glided into port. All too soon, it was time to clear customs and quarantine, say goodbye to staff and crew and board the bus that would take us our separate ways. Although it was time to return to life as it was before this trip, we will always carry the memories of our time on the Southern Ocean and the friends we made. Should our memories become slightly fuzzy over time, we have our myriad of amazing photographs to remind us of this amazing adventure.