



*The gorgeous Marquesan Ground Dove... a Birdquest lifer and our bird-of-the trip! (Pete Morris)*

## **FRENCH POLYNESIA & THE COOK ISLANDS**

**17 OCTOBER – 2/8 NOVEMBER 2017**

**LEADERS:** PETE MORRIS and MARK BEAMAN

After a three year absence, Birdquest returned to Polynesia this year with a bang! We modified our approach a little to give us an even more comprehensive coverage of the region, and this necessitated splitting the tour into two: this tour and the complementary Pitcairn, Henderson and the Tuamotus which preceded this tour. It has to be said, the two combined produced an unrivalled selection of Polynesian species, with every single target endemic being seen well!

It has to be said, this was not a tour for those that are after a long bird list, with just 80 species recorded, including those seen on the extension. However, the quality was high, with no fewer than 50 diamond birds being recorded – an amazingly high percentage of special birds! The first part of this tour focused on various island groups in French Polynesia. Beginning on Tahiti and Moorea (where we easily found our target endemics), we



*Tahiti Petrels were one of the most regular pelagic seabirds (Pete Morris)*

then flew far to the northeast to way off Nuku Hiva in the Marquesas. Having explored this island, complete with its amazing Marquesan Imperial Pigeons, we then reunited with the R. V. Braveheart and set sail. For nearly a week we explored a number of remote islands in the Northern and Southern Marquesas, bagging all of the available endemics which included two Birdquest lifers – Marquesan Ground Dove and Marquesan Monarch, and some great rarities such as the critically endangered Marquesan Kingfisher and Fatu Hiva Monarch. Numerous Bulwer's and Tahiti Petrels and Polynesian Storm Petrels were also appreciated. The next leg of our tour saw us making the long passage to Rangiroa, where we found the critically endangered Polynesian Ground Dove and the gorgeous Blue Lorikeet. We then visited Niau, for the critically endangered Niau Kingfisher, and Makatea for two effectively endemic pigeons, before returning to Moorea where the very successful main tour ended. Thanks to the skill and determination of Matt and his conscientious crew, we were once again able to make landings on all of the hoped-for islands, despite some challenging conditions! Most of us then flew to Rarotonga in the Cook Islands for one final week of Pacific endemics. Visiting three islands, we easily found all of the endemics as well as the beautiful Kuhl's Lorikeet, rounding off the adventure.

Having met up, and fed and rested in Papeete (the main city in Tahiti and indeed the capital of French Polynesia), we were up early the following morning, and soon after breakfast we had met up with our local guide at a beach park 20 km south of the town. From here we followed our helpful guide Gianluca up to a small car park at the entrance to the protected area in the Papehue Valley. Having ignored several introduced species on the way up (sadly the likes of Rock Dove, Zebra Dove, Red-vented Bulbul, Silvereye, Common Myna, Common Waxbill, Red-browed Finch and Chestnut-breasted Mannikin dominate the avifauna here), we set about finding the real birds! The distinctive local form of Pacific Swallow flitted about amongst the trees, Grey-green Fruit



*The rare Tahiti Monarch (sub-adult on the left, adult on the right) was seen well at one of its last strongholds (Pete Morris)*

Doves moved around in the canopy, and loud calls drew us to the noisy Tahiti (or Society) Kingfisher. Tiny Tahiti Swiftlets flitted overhead, as did several White-tailed Tropicbirds along the cliff edges, but our main target was to be found further up the valley, and after a short walk and a few interesting stream crossings, we arrived in the territory of the critically endangered Tahiti Monarch. This species is now known to occur in only four valleys on the west side of Tahiti. In 2012, the total population amounted to only 43 or 44 individuals occupying 25 territories. Thanks to an effective programme of rat control, there seems to have been a slight recovery in the population in recent years, but this situation could easily change. It did not take us long to find first a brown immature bird and then a sub adult at a nest followed by a black pair of adults, also attending a nest. Over the next hour or so, we had some great views of the adults attending their nest and a couple of other individuals. After our successful visit, we made our way back down to the vehicles, pausing to scope Grey-green Fruit Doves, and then made our way back for a leisurely lunch back at our hotel in Papeete.



*Sadly, introduced birds such as Peaceful Dove and Chestnut-breasted Mannikin were common in the Marquesas (Pete Morris)*



*Tahiti Reed Warblers (both morphs) and Tahiti (Society) Kingfishers were seen well. Below, the Moorea subspecies of Grey-green Fruit Dove (Pete Morris)*



We spent the afternoon birding in the Papenoo Valley, on the north coast of the island about 20 km east of Papeete. Unfortunately, the recent frequent and often heavy rain had really swollen the river in the valley, and we were only allowed up a few kilometres before the road was closed off. Our target here was the Tahiti Reed Warbler which favours areas with cane and bamboo, and unfortunately, most of the good habitat for the species was still further up the valley. Not to be put off, we had to revert to plan b, and birded back down the road instead. There were small patches of bamboo, even near to where we were parked, and we soon reaped the rewards, finding both a yellow and a chocolate-brown Tahiti Reed Warbler. We also saw a couple more Grey-



*The highly distinctive Moorea (Society) Kingfisher was seen brilliantly and was another potential Birdquest lifer! (Pete Morris)*

green Fruit Doves and Society Kingfishers, but with the weather closing in a bit, we headed back to Papeete for an early bath and another lavish meal!

With the Tahiti birds under our belt, we decided to explore the adjacent island of Moorea the following day. A fine breakfast was enjoyed on the quayside at Papeete, before we boarded our large, fast and modern ferry. The passage across was a mere 45 minutes, though there was plenty to look at with numerous Tahiti Petrels and Red-footed Boobies, a few Tropical Shearwaters, and even a pod of Spinner Dolphins. It was pretty wet and dreary on Moorea, and as we made our way up into the higher centre of the island, we passed through frequent showers. Fortunately, we arrived at our destination at a dry time, and a few minutes later had the drab but interesting Moorea Kingfisher (recognized by BirdLife as a full species but included with Tahiti Kingfisher as Society Kingfisher by the IOC) lined up in the scope. We then spent the next couple of hours pottering up and down the road and along a forest trail whilst dodging the frequent rain. We managed some more great views of the kingfishers and found a couple of the local subspecies of Grey-green Fruit Dove before heading back down the road. We paused at some fishponds, adding Pacific Golden Plover and Wandering Tattler before making our way back to Papeete. Strong winds on the ferry made seawatching on the way back more of a challenge, and we arrived back at the hotel in time for a decent break before dinner.

Onwards ever onwards, we were again up early the following morning, this time heading back to Faa'a Airport for our flight up to Nuku Hiva, the largest of the Marquesas. It was quite a long flight northeast to Nuku Hiva and we touched down mid-morning. Being further north, and closer to the equator, it was apparent that the heat and humidity were rising! We made our way across the island in three vehicles, pausing frequently to look at some truly impressive views on this extremely mountainous island. Very soon we were adding the local specialities. Northern Marquesan Reed Warblers, White-capped Fruit Doves and Marquesan Swiftlets were soon added and before long we were scrutinizing the local (Lesser) White Terns (a very pretty tern which we were to find commonly throughout the Marquesas which is surely a good species with that tiny dark bill, large black eye and tiny size). Our first Marquesan (or Nukuhiva) Imperial Pigeon flashed by tantalizingly, but it wasn't too long before a pair were spotted at the roadside. These proved to be extremely popular as they allopreened and



*Marquesan Imperial Pigeons and White-capped Fruit Doves showed brilliantly on Nuku Hiva (Pete Morris)*





As well as the Marquesan Imperial Pigeon, we admired the scenery on Nuku Hiva and visited the impressive marae at Hatiheu (Pete Morris)



snuggled up together, showing off the ridiculous appendage on top of their bills! We managed several more great looks at these pigeons on the drive down to Taiohae, as well as enjoying a picnic lunch where we were introduced to a new favourite... the wonderful local 'pamplemousse' (grapefruit).

Having checked into our three accommodations (a less than straightforward affair!) we made an excursion to the restored ruins of a *marae* (a sacred place used for both religious and communal purposes) at Kamuhei.

More imperial pigeons were seen en route as well as in the tall fig trees surrounding the *marae* as were more White-capped Fruit Doves, Northern Marquesan Reed Warblers and Marquesan Swiftlets. After an enjoyable hour wandering around the ruins, we returned to the main town of Taiohae on the south coast for our final dinner on terra firma for a while!

The following morning turned out to be a little anti-climatic. Having had such a good day the previous day, and seen everything so well, all we could really do was relax (which several of the group did) or return to the forests and see the endemics again. Several of us opted for the latter, but strangely, although we saw all of the endemics again, there seemed to be less activity in the early morning, fewer pigeons in evidence, and few photographic opportunities. Oh well, you can't win them all, and it was a pleasant enough morning anyway.



*Marquesan Swiftlet and Northern Marquesan Reed Warbler were two more new birds on Nuku Hiva (Pete Morris)*

After a fine breakfast, we then had a few logistical exercises to go through, giving us a chance to catch up with Matt and the crew of the *Braveheart*, and spend a bit of relaxation time before the start of the real adventure...

Mid afternoon we were down on the jetty and being ferried across to the *Braveheart*. It was familiar territory for most of us, so settling in was a quick and easy affair, and before we knew it we were off! And it didn't take too long before we were engrossed. As we left Taiohae, we soon ran into what were to be familiar mixed flocks of boobies and noddies, and we soon noticed that these held the hoped-for Blue Noddy. Bulwer's Petrels began to appear (this species proved to be positively common around the Marquesas), and we were also thrilled to see at least three Polynesian Storm Petrels – a real stunner that we'd had to work hard for on the previous tour! We were also richly entertained by a playful pod of at least 25 Spinner Dolphins, one of which did a few corkscrew manoeuvres in front of us. A magic way to end our first day at sea! As the sun sank below the horizon, we steamed north to the far-off island of Hatutu.

We awoke the following morning just off the coast of Hatutu. This proved to be a larger and more imposing looking island than some of us had perhaps imagined! The first priority was to get ashore safely, and after a bit of scouting we found a landing site, though with the swell rolling in, this was a little hairy to say the least! However, with Matt's skills, we managed to unload onto a coral shelf and carefully get on to the dry rocks. First job done! There was then the small matter of getting up on to the island. This was a little tricky too, and whilst contemplating our approach, a myna-like bird flew towards us... the penny dropped, it was our first Marquesan Ground Dove!! A flight view is better than no view, and it was a decent flight view, those big white wing flashes taking us by surprise! Another couple were spotted in flight, allowing those that were not keen on the climb some views; in fact, it was even ticked off from the naiaid, as was a Christmas Shearwater which circled around.





*Who doesn't love seeing a dolphin!? Spinner Dolphin spinning above, and Bottle-nosed Dolphin below (Pete Morris)*





*Bulwer's Petrel and Polynesian Storm Petrels were seen in good numbers early in the tour. Great sunsets were seen throughout! (Pete Morris)*





*The imposing Hatutu Island and the ground dove slope (Pete Morris)*

We then scrambled up the slope and made our way up the island. Being uninhabited, with no trails, this was not all that easy. Most of the open passages were either over rocky grassland or along dry rocky riverbeds, and our progress was frequently thwarted by rather thick scratchy vegetation. Nevertheless we persevered, admiring numerous breeding Great Frigatebirds and Brown and Masked Boobies as we went. Northern Marquesan Reed Warblers were found in small numbers, but despite much effort, the ground doves were proving elusive. We tried areas of tussock grass, looked under bushes and stumbled to wherever we could get, but still the dove held out. Then, we arrived at a more open area and a dove was seen to fly in. Some careful stalking and there it was, the seldom seen and very special Marquesan Ground Dove, in its full magenta and purple-hued



*Getting ashore on Hatutu Island presented a bit of a challenge (Björn Andersson)*

splendour. Smiles erupted just as another appeared, then another and another! We suddenly realised that we had hit the absolute epicentre of their range, and within the next hour we'd estimated at least 70 of these rare and attractive birds! The walk down was a challenge, though not too bad with care, and we managed to get everyone safely back to the Braveheart, with a fine mission accomplished. That afternoon we headed a little further offshore, enjoying bow-riding Spinner Dolphins that were replaced by huge Bottle-nosed Dolphins. Chumming produced more brilliant views of Tahiti and Bulwer's Petrels and stunning Polynesian Storm Petrels springing off the surface of the ocean like one-legged mechanical toys. Unfortunately we had to cut the chumming short as there was a desire to make another landing on Hatutu. A few of the group did manage to get ashore again, in fairly tricky landing conditions, though little was seen at this alternative site.



*The gorgeous Marquesan Ground Doves stole the show on Hatutu Island (Pete Morris)*



We were again at sea overnight, enjoying the relative calmness of the Marquesan waters, and by the following morning we were just off Vaipae on Ua Huka. Our two targets on Ua Huka were the Ultramarine Lorikeet and Iphis Monarch, and after a straightforward landing on a stone jetty, we made our way through town, where we were warmly received by the friendly local folk – a theme that continued throughout the welcoming Marquesas. We soon found some friendly helpers who drove us a few kilometres up the road to the arboretum, and we set

about our task. The Iphis Monarch was found relatively easily and our first Ultramarine Lorikeets flashed over, but finding one perched was less straightforward. However, we soon enlisted the help of another new friend, who not only got us to our first perched lorikeets, but also educated us about the local fruits and provided a stash for those that wished to sneak some back to their cabins! The lorikeets were lovely, and we saw more



*Ultramarine Lorikeets and Iphis Monarch were the two main targets on the friendly island of Ua Huka (Pete Morris)*



as we headed back, along with more Iphis Monarchs. Stunning White-capped Fruit Doves and noisy Northern Marquesan Reed Warblers were also much in evidence, but it was getting warm and cold beers were beckoning...

We returned to the boat mid afternoon and set sail once more, passing a huge and impressive Sooty Tern colony. A little chummong provided more views of brilliant Polynesian Storm Petrels as well as more Bulwer's and Tahiti Petrels, but it was then time to set sail once more. We were bound for the Southern Marquesas and the passage down was once again calm and pleasant. We paused briefly at Atuona on Hiva Oa to pick up Teike, a friend of the crew who was going to help us for a few days, and then made the short passage across to Ta-



Several gorgeous Marquesan Kingfishers showed well on lovely Tahuata Island (Pete Morris)



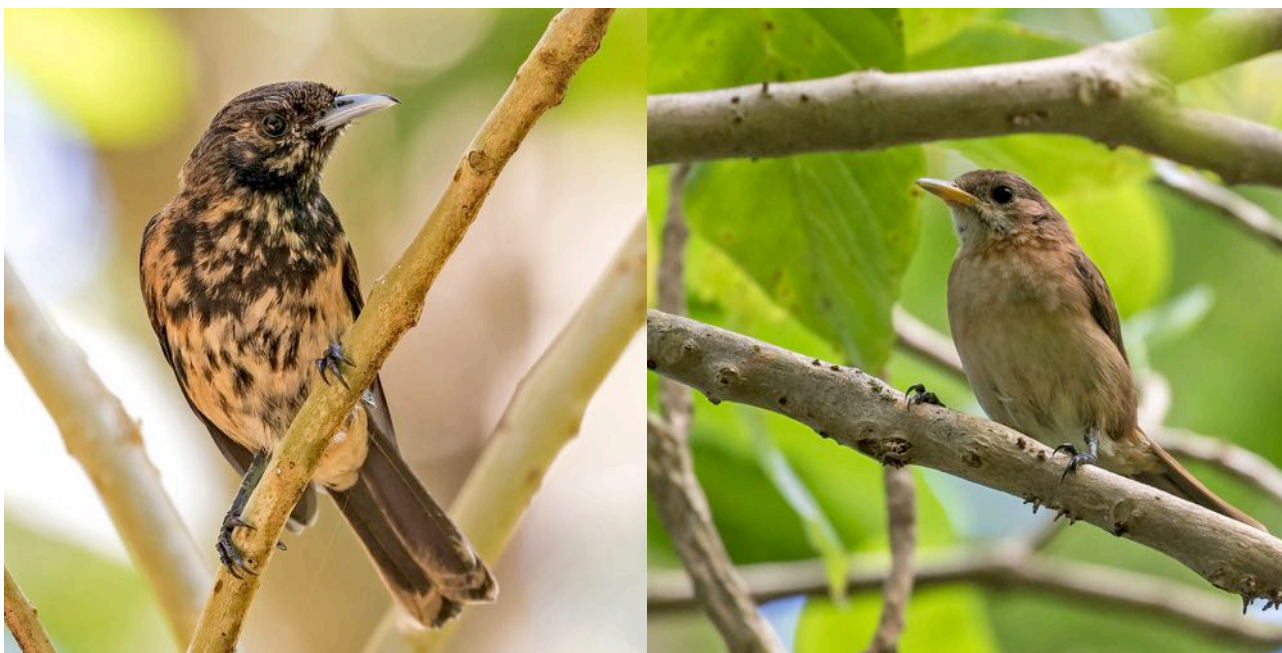
huata. Here we had another straightforward landing and were met by more friendly locals who were genuinely pleased to see us and eager to help us. We loaded up into a couple of pick-ups and literally five minutes later we were peering at a pair of gorgeous Marquesan Kingfishers – another critically endangered species! Nearby we found our first Southern Marquesan Reed Warbler complete with its impressive bill, and then we explored a road that crossed over the mountainous interior of the island and soon found more kingfishers, reed warblers

and attractive White-capped Fruit Doves as well as a few Marquesan Swiftlets overhead. After a pleasant walk, we made our way back to town, visited the cold beer shop, and feasted on coconut and grapefruit provided by our generous hosts, before returning once more to the Braveheart. The afternoon passage to Mohotani passed without too much excitement and we arrived in time for a quick recce of the relatively difficult landing sites!

Although there was not a heavy swell the following morning, it was enough to make the landing a little tricky, and what we thought would be our best option was not looking good. As a result, we went for the easier landing which involved a slightly more difficult climb, but once we were over the first bit, the walk became considerably easier. An hour or so of easy uphill walking and a bit of trail cutting soon had us up into the forest, and soon after our quarry was found – the poorly known Marquesan Monarch, another Birdquest lifer!! Several were found including a juvenile, a mottled subadult male, an adult male, and three attractively pied females! The walk had been worth the effort, and the views from the top of the island truly spectacular. White-capped Fruit Doves and Southern Marquesan Reed Warblers were the only other native landbirds seen, though we also had fun picking the birdseye chillies! We made our way back down, carefully negotiating the rocky section, and got back to the boat in time to crack a celebratory cold one before lunch!



*A pleasant stroll on uninhabited Mohotani Island led us to another Birdquest lifer - Marquesan Monarch. Female (left) and male above. Immature male and juvenile below (Pete Morris)*





*The view from the top on Mohotani Island and the happy group on the way back down! (Pete Morris)*

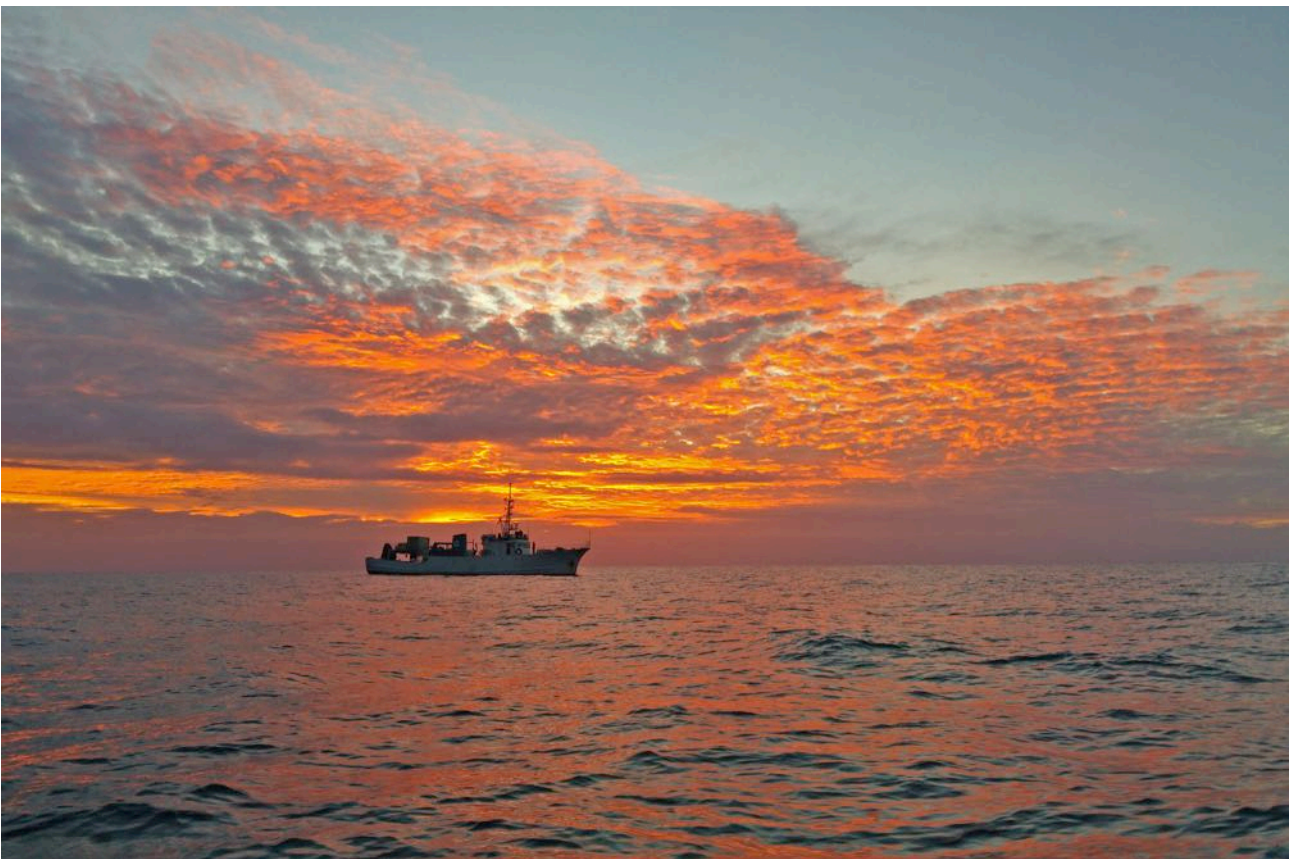


Some of the group were keen to get to the famous Baie des Vièrges (Bay of Virgins) at Hanavave for the late afternoon light, so we set sail promptly for Fatu Hiva, noting good numbers of Wedge-tailed Shearwaters as we went. A combination of clouds and a construction crane made it a less impressive spectacle than it had been portrayed as, but still a pleasant section of coastline! We then made our way along the coast to Omoa and enjoyed the sunset whilst making plans for the morning.



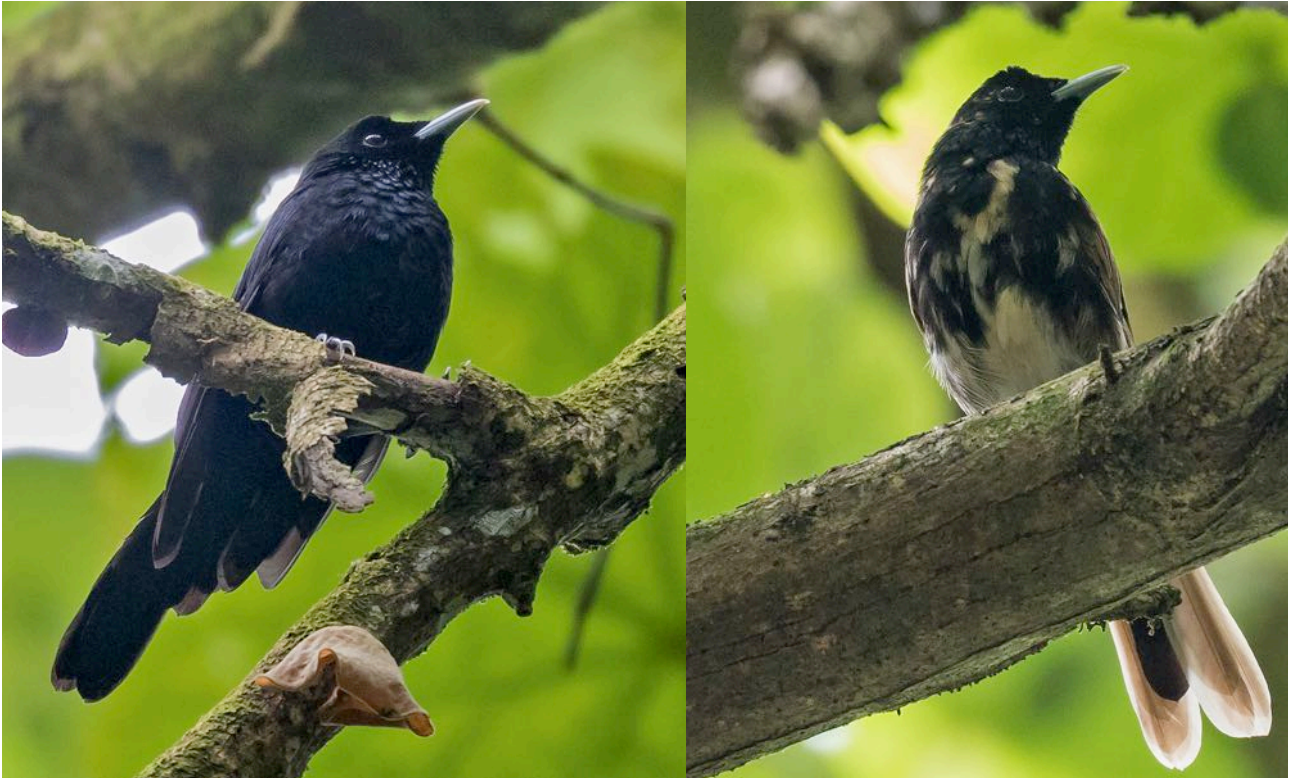


*A couple of views of our home, the RV Braveheart, off scenic Fatu Hiva. Above (Björn Andersson) and below at sunset (Pete Morris)*



The following morning the impressive inter-island ship, the Aranui 5 was alongside us, but we were onshore way ahead of them, with the luxury of a jetty landing. Our main target on Fatu Hiva, the Fatu Hiva Monarch, is one of the rarest birds in the world. Prior to the arrival of Black Rats on the island in the late 1980s, the population was estimated at 400-1,000 birds, but since then it has plummeted and is now thought to number only about 16 birds. To ensure our success with the monarch, we had enlisted the help of the local experts, and having arrived at the end of the road, we set off with them up a steep-sided, wooded valley. The short walk up the valley was not without interest, as it required several stream crossings on slippery rocks, but we all just

about made it, and soon afterwards found our first Fatu Hiva Monarch. A rather large and sluggish creature, we managed some great views before it moved off. Despite some effort to reach another territory, we only heard a couple of others, before returning to the original area, and here we located the pair, a juvenile and a subadult, potentially 25% of the world population!! Southern Marquesan Reed Warblers and White-capped Fruit Doves also showed well, and after another great morning which completed our Marquesan endemic haul, we made it back down to town in time for some shopping for those that desired.



*Fatu Hiva Monarch, one of the worlds rarest birds. Adult and immature above (Pete Morris); juvenile (Pete Morris) and adult (Björn Andersson) below.*



We now had a large swathe of the Pacific lying between us and our next destination of Rangiroa in the far off Tuamotus. Some attempted chumming provided nothing different, but as we set sail at dusk we were surprised to see a couple of Band-rumped Storm Petrels which popped up just in front of the boat. For the next couple of days we chugged steadily southwest making good progress. Seabirding was tough... There were birds out there, but pinning them down in the huge ocean was hard work. Chumming seemed ineffective to all but Tahiti Petrels, and to be honest, many of the *Pterodromas* we saw seemed to take one look at the boat and head off in the opposite direction! That said, there were rewards for those that were prepared to stare at the sea for long periods of time, and during the voyage we managed several good views of Juan Fernandez Petrels, a



*Birding from the back deck required stamina, but had rewards! Left to right: Gould's Petrel; Juan Fernandez Petrel; one of many smart flying fish; and a moulting Tropical Shearwater (Pete Morris)*



few decent looks at Collared Petrels, and saw several birds that appeared to be Gould's Petrels. It would just have been so nice to see a few more and a bit closer, but that's the way it goes! Also noted were a few Sooty Shearwaters and a couple of Long-tailed Jaegers.

After two full days at sea, it was a pleasant relief to wake just off the coast of the large Rangiroa Atoll, and pretty soon we were negotiating the interesting Tiputa Pass to take us in to the lagoon itself. Our first Spectacled (or Grey-backed) Terns and a friendly pod of Bottle-nosed Dolphins accompanied us through the pass and pretty soon we were heading to the southern side of the vast lagoon. Mid morning we were anchored off some small motus (islets), and were soon whisked ashore, skilfully dodging in and out of the coral bommies. We were greeted by vocal Bristle-thighed Curlews, though our objective here was to find the rare Polynesian Ground Dove, and we knew the odds were stacked against us to some degree. The population was known to be dwindling, and in the last few years just a handful of males and no females had been seen. We searched many islets, and were lucky to find just one individual. Although we can't be certain there were no others, we didn't see any more, and it's entirely possible that the one bird we saw is the last remaining individual in the



*The group in Rangiroa Lagoon, and possibly the last Polynesian Ground Dove living there! (Pete Morris)*



population. We watched him foraging on the forest floor with mixed emotions. Delighted we had found him, but deeply saddened that it could well be the end of the population, and to be honest, this confiding individual did not look too well. With one foot missing, and heavily abraded plumage, it looked rather tired and old, and one could only wonder how much longer this poor old male would survive. Also around the islands were numerous breeding frigatebirds, boobies, Common White Terns and noddies, including several vocal Blue Noddies that entertained us. One of the islets held three Ruddy Turnstones too, whilst the channels we crossed between the islets were home to numerous Black-tipped Reef Sharks.



*The gorgeous Blue Lagoon was a great place to catch up with the rare Bristle-thighed Curlew (Pete Morris)*



After lunch we made our way to the famous Blue Lagoon. Here it took a matter of minutes to find the spectacular Blue Lorikeets, and through the afternoon we got some great views of these most unusual-looking parrots as they frequented the coconut groves in good numbers, often hanging upside down off the fronds or screeching over at high speed. Tuamotu Reed Warbler was also not difficult to see as a couple of vocal birds showed very well, and around the lagoon, numerous Bristle-thighed Curlews



*The stunning Blue Lorikeet was common at the Blue Lagoon, where we witnessed a classic tropical sunset (Pete Morris)*



and Wandering Tattlers obliged. Other than the mosquitoes, it had been a lovely afternoon and as the sun sank down below the coconut palms, giving us yet another glorious sunset, our back deck celebrations began, with another fine lamb roast and plenty of wine!

We awoke to more cases of BDF (back deck fever), but **most** soon recovered as we sailed back across the Rangiroa Lagoon. For logistical reasons (to checkin with the police) we needed to visit Ohotu, and this also

gave us time to study large flocks of Spectacled Terns, and, for those that wished, to partake in a bit of snorkelling. Once the Tiputa Pass was free of divers, we followed our old friend, the Aranui 5, out through the pass, but then set off in the opposite direction, for we were headed east to the remote island of Niau. Good numbers of Juan Fernandez Petrels that afternoon were a surprise.

The landing on Niau the following morning was fairly straightforward, if a little slippery, and after meeting and greeting the local folk, we made our way south into the coconut forest. We very soon encountered our first Niau Kingfishers, and through the course of the morning saw around 30 of these critically endangered birds



*Grey-backed Terns at Rangiroa Lagoon, where we again crossed paths with the impressive Aranui 5 (Pete Morris)*





*Niau Kingfishers, another of the world's rarest, put on a great show (Pete Morris)*

(perhaps 20% of the world population). The gorgeous gleaming blue and white birds, with subtly rusty-tinged heads, set off against the emerald palm fronds were a lovely sight. We explored the whole of the southeast of the island, checking out the interesting land-locked sea lagoon. During the morning we also found numerous Atoll Fruit Doves that were much in evidence, with several showing well, and the local form of Tuamotu Reed Warbler was frequently heard and was also seen well.

By late morning we were back aboard, this time heading back west to the small island of Makatea. Our final attempt at chumming only pulled in a few of the usual suspects, and soon after first light the following morning we were watching the sheer cliffs that surround the high limestone plateau of the once well-known island of Makatea. Makatea is very different from the other islands in the Tuamotus, being a raised or uplifted coral atoll and landing here can be precarious. The conditions were good, and landing relatively straightforward for an experienced group like us, as we were put ashore in the old decaying harbour! This strange island was once a thriving community, and we strolled around enjoying the ghost town atmosphere of this once prosperous place, where several thousand people used to live and work up until the early sixties. Warehouses, several gantries, the disused railway with the remains of locomotives and a plateau full of shafts where the phosphate was dug from, reminded us of the busy mining days. It took only a little while to get great views of our two target species, the subtle Makatea Fruit Dove (not very different from its Atoll relative!) and the large Polynesian Imperial Pigeon. The latter used to occur on Tahiti, but is probably extinct there now. Tuamotu Reed Warblers were also common, and the endemic subspecies seemed both morphologically and vocally distinct, and perhaps worthy of elevation to another Makatea endemic?!

We'd finished by late morning, and gathered back at the harbour, watching the Pacific Golden Plovers, Pacific Reef Egrets and Wandering Tattlers. Matt and the team were soon back to take us back to the Braveheart, and it turned out to be a fun ride as we had to time it right to get through the breakers that were by now rolling





*Makatea Fruit Dove, a subtle species at best, and some of the old factory buildings on Makatea (Pete Morris)*



into the harbour. We all made it safely, and before long, the bow was pointing southwest and we were off to Moorea. We arrived around midnight and anchored, allowing for a calm night before our final disembarkation. As we had a last drink and chat with Matt and his crew, we could reflect back on what had been another remarkable couple of weeks of our lives. Matt and the team really had done us proud, getting us ashore whenever we wanted, despite some challenging conditions. We'd been fed and looked after well, and grown to love

our little homes on the Braveheart. We'd seen a great variety of rare birds, met some lovely people and visited some amazing islands. Oh... and we also got to see the green flash, a phenomenon some of us never even believed in, and some still don't!

But the following morning, that was it. We jumped on to the Naiad one last time and went ashore, admiring the reef fish at the hotel as we went. The journey back to Papeete was straightforward. A taxi ride, a speedy ferry, complete with breaching Humpback Whales, and then a taxi to Faa'a airport where the main tour ended.



*Wandering Tattler and Pacific Reef Egret were present on the beach at Makatea (Pete Morris)*



From Papeete, most of us took a lunchtime flight to Rarotonga in the Cook Islands, far to the southwest. Here, we had a quick six night extension to find the handful of endemics and specialities housed on these islands. By the time we had arrived at Rarotonga International Airport, there was little time to do much other than organize and check-in to our hotel.

We were up early the following morning, and made our way up to the excellent Takitumu Conservation Area. Eastern Rosellas were noted on the way in, and we had a short guided walk around the area by local Kakerori (Rarotonga Monarch) protector Ian, and were then left to our own devices. The morning was extremely successful, despite the less than helpful weather, and we enjoyed great views of Pacific Imperial Pigeon and Rarotonga Starling, and we soon notched up several endangered Rarotonga Monarchs, some of which gave outstanding views. Higher up, we hung around at a viewpoint where more of the same birds were present, as were a colony of Pacific Flying Foxes (the short-billed form!!). We also eventually tracked down a lovely Lilac-crowned Fruit Dove, the form on Rarotonga sporting a lilac belly patch. With worsening weather we



*The Takitumu Conservation Area provided all we wanted! Here, Pacific Imperial Pigeon, the Rarotonga form of Lilac-crowned Fruit Dove, the rare Rarotonga Starling, and Rarotonga Monarch - a species on its way back thanks to conservation efforts (Pete Morris)*



headed back down and then back to base. In the afternoon, some chose to take it easy, others snorkelled and some made a return visit to the Takitumu Conservation Area, where the same birds were in evidence, and we also tracked down a fine Pacific Long-tailed Cuckoo which showed well in the canopy and shot around calling, displaying its amazingly long appendage!



*Pacific Long-tailed Cuckoos can be tricky to see, but we did well on this tour! (Pete Morris)*



The weather was still poor the following morning, so we simply made our way to the airport, organized our baggage and checked in for our flight to Atiu. Here we were greeted by our hosts, given a brief tour of the island and settled into our lovely cabins. Atiu has recently become a very special island, in conservation terms, for one very simple reason. The nasty Common Mynas have been eradicated, and consequently the local birds



*Pacific Golden Plover and Chattering Kingfisher greeted us at the airport on Atiu (Pete Morris)*





*The Atiu form of Lilac-crowned Fruit Dove is somewhat duller. Introduced Raratonga Monarchs are doing well on Atiu (Pete Morris)*

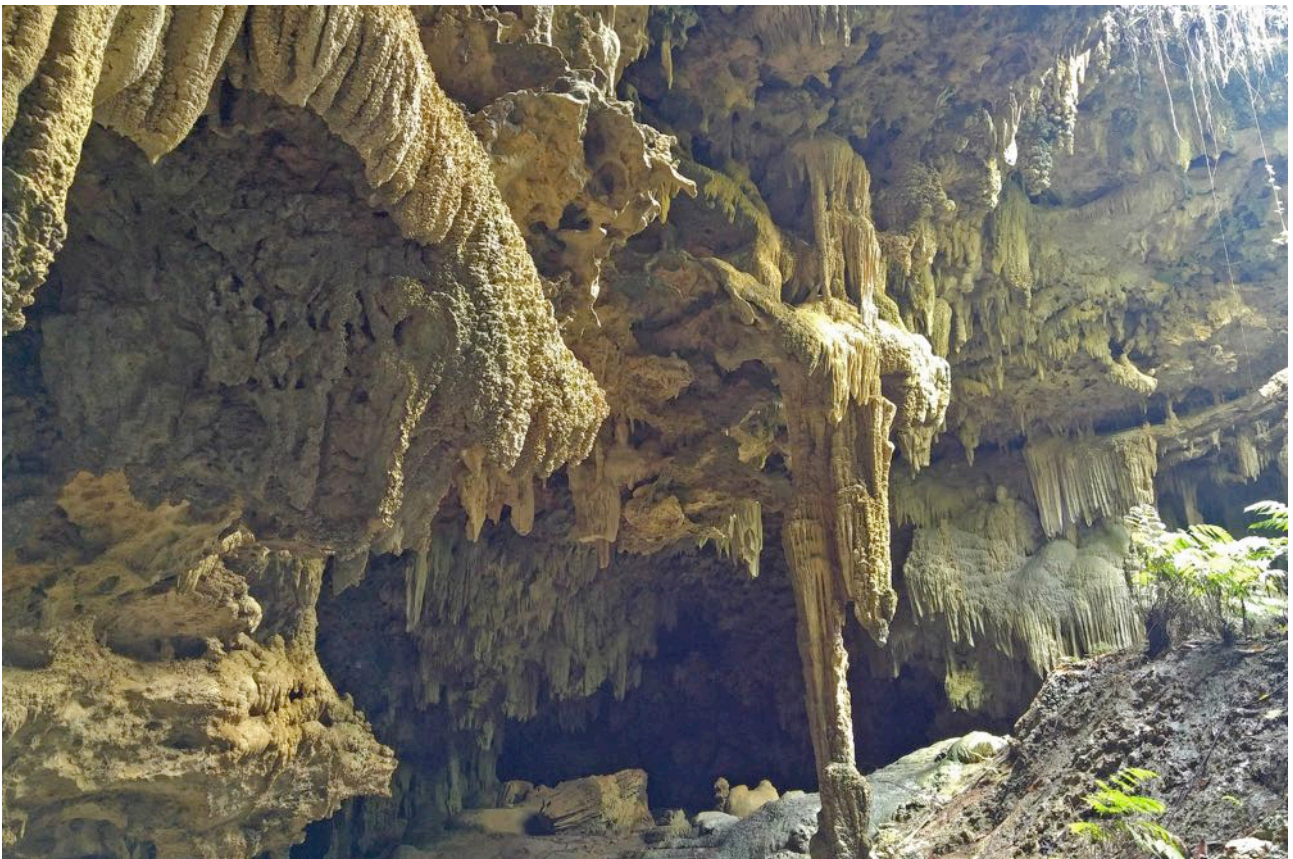


are flourishing. It's even allowed for the successful reintroduction of Kuhl's Lorikeets and the introduction (as a back up safety option) of Rarotonga Monarchs. Having already briefly seen all of the targets, either on the journey or around the garden, our task was to consolidate and improve upon the views.

After lunch, and having scrutinized the local form of Lilac-crowned Fruit Dove in the garden, most of us visited the swiftlet caves where we were treated to fantastic views of these endemics on their fragile nests. We also heard them echo-locate in the darkness of their breeding cave which was an excellent experience. The caves themselves were pretty spectacular too, though the walk in and out was not for the faint-hearted. Once our



*Atiu Swiftlets were seen well in their breeding caves on Atiu (Pete Morris)*



cave tour was complete, we made our way back, first finding another Pacific Long-tailed Cuckoo, and then notching up some great looks at the endemic form of Chattering Kingfisher and our first good looks at the stunning Kuhl's Lorikeet.

The following morning, most of us explored locally on foot. First in and around the hotel, and then, after breakfast, slightly further afield to a wetland and back. This gave us ample opportunities to get great looks at all of the specialities again. Chattering Kingfishers were common, Pacific Imperial Pigeons conspicuous,



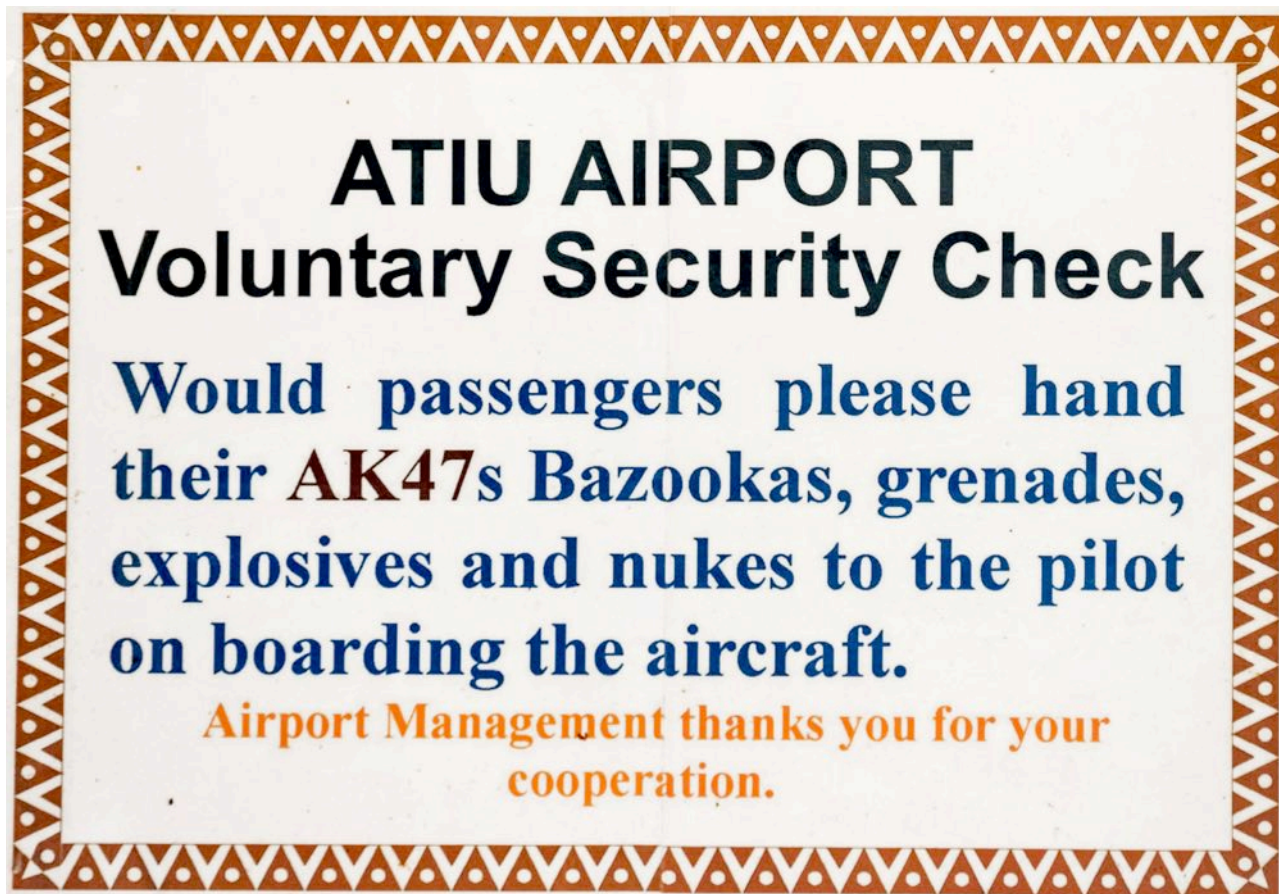
*A feeding Atiu Swiftlet and a Chattering Kingfisher doing what they do best... (Pete Morris)*





and Kuhl's Lorikeets everywhere. These dazzling lorikeets have expanded from 27 birds in 2007 (the time of their reintroduction) to many hundreds, and they seem to be doing very well indeed. We also noted several more fruit doves, found quite a few Rarotonga Monarchs (including a ringed individual which is apparently about 15 years old), and noted several Atiu Swiftlets. Following lunch, we took it pretty easy, ending up at the beach for dinner, where we were joined by a couple of Humpback Whales offshore! On the way back we ticked off Pacific Black Duck for our Cook Islands list.

On our last day on Atiu, we made an excursion with the local 'Birdman George'. This proved to be good fun as George showed us a few of his favourite haunts, and we got many more great views of the specialities. After a pleasant lunch, we made our way back to the airport, conformed with the voluntary airport security check(!!), and then took our chartered flight across to Mangaia, the southernmost island in the Cook archipelago our third and final Cook Island.



*The signs at Atiu airport caused amusement! (Pete Morris)*

Upon arrival we were welcomed by Jan, our friendly Swedish host, and driven in batches to our accommodation. Venturing out, we soon found our two targets, the common Cook Island Reed Warbler, and the less conspicuous Mewing (or Mangaia) Kingfisher. Indeed we had plenty of time to venture out to find these birds, getting many great looks. The kingfisher in particular was a real stunner, and we even had the privilege of watching a pair at the nest. Most of us also had the opportunity to tour around the island with Jan, seeing the varied scenery of the island and plenty more ducks! Our final evening together was a jolly and interesting one. Jan and his team laid on a great meal for us, but things went slightly wrong when we ran out of beer and Jan went for more. The new stock did eventually arrive, but it came at a cost, though thankfully no harm was done (except to the car!).

And so our successful extension came to an end. We flew back to Rarotonga without a hitch, reunited ourselves with our bags and checked in for the long journeys ahead (almost 48hrs for some of us!). It had been an amazing Pacific adventure, one that will linger in our memories for the rest of our days! Yet when you peer at the atlas, all that travel barely made a scratch on the surface of the Pacific. It really is that vast!



*The gorgeous Mewing Kingfisher and the common Cook Island Reed Warbler were our two targets on Mangaia Island (Pete Morris)*





*The stunning Kuhl's Lorikeet was without doubt the star looker of the Cook Islands (Pete Morris)*

## SYSTEMATIC LIST OF SPECIES RECORDED DURING THE TOUR

Species marked with the diamond symbol (◊) are either endemic to the country or local region or considered 'special' birds for some other reason (e.g. it is only seen on one or two Birdquest tours; it is difficult to see across all or most of its range; the local form is endemic or restricted-range and may in future be treated as a full species).

Species marked with the symbol (C) were only recorded on the Cook Islands extension.

Species which were heard but not seen are indicated by the symbol (H).

Species which were not personally recorded by the leader are indicated by the symbol (NL).

Species which were only recorded by the leader are indicated by the symbol (LO).

Conservation threat categories and information are taken from *Threatened Birds of the World*, BirdLife International's magnificent book on the sad status of the rarest 10% of the world's avifauna, and updates on the BirdLife website: <http://www.birdlife.org/datazone/home>

**(EW)** = Extinct in the wild, **(CR)** = Critically Endangered, **(EN)** = Endangered, **(VU)** = Vulnerable, **(NT)** = Near Threatened, **(DD)** = Data Deficient.

For polytypic species, the subspecies seen on the tour, where known, is placed in parentheses at the end of the species comment. Generally, species listed with trinomials are not currently split by the IOC.

The species names and taxonomy used in the report mostly follows Gill, F & D Donsker (Eds). **2017. IOC World Bird List (v 7.3)**. This list is updated several times annually and is available at <http://www.worldbirdnames.org>. Please note, this was the current version when the report checklist was created. Some alternative names are given in parentheses.

All of our checklists are powered by our partner iGoTerra ([www.igoterra.com](http://www.igoterra.com)) who provide web and mobile applications for bird and wildlife enthusiasts and businesses. Their suite of services cover observations, rankings, lists, photos and trip management tools.

**Pacific Black Duck (Grey D) *Anas superciliosa*** Seen briefly on Moorea, and then seen well on Atiu [*pelewensis*].

**Red Junglefowl (introduced) *Gallus gallus*** Common and widespread sadly!

**Polynesian Storm Petrel** ◊ *Nesofregatta fuliginosa* (EN) A total of 8+ seen off Nuku Hiva, Hatutu and Ua Huka.

**Band-rumped Storm Petrel** ◊ *Oceanodroma castro* At least two at dusk as we sailed south from Nuku Hiva. A surprise.

**Juan Fernandez Petrel** ◊ *Pterodroma externa* (VU) 20+ seen, most between the Marquesas and Rangiroa, and off Rangiroa.

**Herald Petrel** ◊ *Pterodroma heraldica* (LO) Just one seen, fairly briefly, off Ua Huka.

**Gould's Petrel** ◊ *Pterodroma leucoptera* (VU) See note.

**Collared** ◊ *Pterodroma brevipes* (VU) Best were the dark and intermediate birds between Fatu Hiva and Rangiroa [nominate].

**Tahiti Petrel** ◊ *Pseudobulweria rostrata* (NT) Probably the most common and distinctive tubenose of the trip.

**Wedge-tailed Shearwater *Ardenna pacifica*** Small numbers with best views between Mohotani and Fatu Hiva.

**Sooty Shearwater *Ardenna grisea* (NT)** Four seen, the first between Fatu Hiva and Rangiroa.

**Christmas Shearwater** ◊ (C Island S) *Puffinus nativitatis* Great views circling the landing site at Hatutu.

**Tropical Shearwater** ◊ *Puffinus bailloni* A few between Papeete and Moorea, small numbers at sea elsewhere [*dichrous*].

**Bulwer's Petrel *Bulweria bulwerii*** Common around the Marquesas, with 50+ seen on three dates.

**Red-tailed Tropicbird *Phaethon rubricauda*** A small number at Hatutu were more or less the only ones [*melanorhynchos*].

**White-tailed Tropicbird *Phaethon lepturus*** A few around Tahiti and on Moorea and elsewhere including Cooks [*dorotheae*].

**Pacific Reef Heron (P R Egret) *Egretta sacra*** Common along the coasts. First on Tahiti and Moorea [nominate].

**Great Frigatebird *Fregata minor*** Common. First on Tahiti and Moorea. Several with large red footballs attached!

**Lesser Frigatebird *Fregata ariel*** A male at Papeete was the first. Small numbers elsewhere [nominate].



A male Great Frigatebird in display over Hatutu Island (Pete Morris)



The male Great Frigatebird takes a nap on his pillow, whilst Brown Booby and a female Lesser Frigatebird showed well (Pete Morris)



- Masked Booby** ◇ *Sula dactylatra* Most common and conspicuous on the grassy slopes of Hatutu [*personata*].
- Red-footed Booby** *Sula sula* Common. First seen on the ferry crossings between Papeete and Moorea [*rubripes*].
- Brown Booby** *Sula leucogaster* Small numbers seen at several locations with close breeding birds on Hatutu [*plotus*].
- Swamp Harrier (introduced)** *Circus approximans* A couple seen on Moorea.
- Spotless Crake** ◇ *Porzana tabuensis* Skittish birds seen on Hatutu and on the motus on Rangiroa.
- Pacific Golden Plover** *Pluvialis fulva* First seen on Moorea. Widespread in small numbers, most common on Makatea.
- Bristle-thighed Curlew** ◇ *Numenius tahitiensis* (VU) One seen on Hatutu and great views of several in Rangiroa Lagoon.
- Ruddy Turnstone** *Arenaria interpres* Three seen at Utuhou in Rangiroa Lagoon [*nominata*].
- Wandering Tattler** *Tringa incana* Common. First seen on Moorea.
- Brown Noddy** *Anous stolidus* Common and widespread [*pileatus*].
- Black Noddy** ◇ *Anous minutus* Also common and widespread [*nominata*].
- Blue Noddy** ◇ (B Ternlet) *Procelsterna cerulea* See note.
- White Tern** ◇ (C Fairy T) *Gygis alba* Common throughout except the Marquesas. First seen on Tahiti [*candida*].
- White Tern** ◇ (Little W T) *Gygis [alba] microrhyncha* See note.
- Greater Crested Tern** *Thalasseus bergii* Several in Papeete Harbour were the first. Several others elsewhere [*cristatus*].



*Common White Tern (top) and Lesser White Tern are sooo different!! Other noddies included Blue Noddy (above left), Brown Noddy (below left) and Black Noddy (Pete Morris)*





*More views of the subtle Blue Noddy, and below, juvenile (left) and adult Sooty Tern (Pete Morris)*



**Spectacled Tern** ◊ (Grey-backed T) *Onychoprion lunatus* Great views of 100+ around Rangiroa Lagoon.  
**Sooty Tern** *Onychoprion fuscatus* 1000's at the colony off Ua Huka were particularly impressive [*oahuensis*].  
**Long-tailed Jaeger (L-t Skua)** *Stercorarius longicaudus* A couple of moulting adults seen en route to Rangiroa [*pallascens*].  
**Rock Dove (introduced)** *Columba livia* Plenty of fine examples of 'Beaman's Pigeon'.  
**Zebra Dove (introduced)** *Geopelia striata* A common introduction to many islands.  
**Polynesian Ground Dove** ◊ *Alopecoenas erythropterus* (CR) See note.  
**Marquesan Ground Dove** ◊ *Alopecoenas rubescens* (VU) Brilliant views of 70+ on Hatutu. Birdquest lifer!!  
**Lilac-crowned Fruit Dove** ◊ (C) (Cook Islands F D) *Ptilinopus rarotongensis* (VU) See note.  
**Grey-green Fruit Dove** ◊ *Ptilinopus purpuratus* We saw two forms: nominate on Tahiti; *frater* on Moorea.  
**Makatea Fruit Dove** ◊ *Ptilinopus chalcurus* (VU) See note.  
**Atoll Fruit Dove** *Ptilinopus coralensis* (NT) Several seen well on Niau.  
**White-capped Fruit Dove** ◊ *Ptilinopus dupetithouarsii* See note.  
**Pacific Imperial Pigeon** ◊ (C) *Ducula pacifica* Seen well at the Takitumu Conservation area and on Atiu [nominate].  
**Polynesian Imperial Pigeon** ◊ *Ducula aurorae* (EN) c10 seen well, and others heard, on Makatea [nominate].



Atoll Fruit Dove (above) was seen well on Niau whilst the endangered Polynesian Imperial Pigeon showed well on Makatea (Pete Morris)





**Marquesan Imperial Pigeon** ◊ (Nukuhiva P) *Ducula galeata* (EN) Brilliant views of good numbers on Nuku Hiva.  
**Pacific Long-tailed Cuckoo** ◊ (L-t Koel) *Urodynamis taitensis* Great views at Takitumu and also seen well on Atiu.  
**Tahiti Swiftlet** ◊ *Aerodramus leucophaeus* See note.  
**Atiu Swiftlet** ◊ (C) *Aerodramus sawtelli* (VU) Great views in the Anatakitaki Caves and around the island.  
**Marquesan Swiftlet** ◊ *Aerodramus ocistus* Two forms: nominate on Nuku Hiva and Ua Huka; *gilliardi* on Tahuata.  
**Chattering Kingfisher** ◊ (C) *Todiramphus tutus* Very common all over Atiu, with 20+ seen per day [atiu].  
**Mewing Kingfisher** ◊ (C) (Mangaia K) *Todiramphus ruficollaris* (VU) Great views of up to 8+ daily on Mangaia.



Gorgeous Mewing Kingfishers on Mangaia Island - pair above, male to the right and female, all close to our hotel on Mangaia Island (Pete Morris)





*A stunning Niau Kingfisher at one of several nests that we located (Pete Morris)*

**Society Kingfisher** ◊ (Tahiti K) *Todiramphus [veneratus] veneratus* Several seen well.

**Society Kingfisher** ◊ (Moorea K) *Todiramphus [veneratus] youngi* (NT) Three seen well on Moorea.

**Niau Kingfisher** ◊ *Todiramphus gertrudae* (CR) Plenty seen well on Niau, including several active nests.

**Marquesan Kingfisher** ◊ *Todiramphus godeffroyi* (CR) Great views of three or four pairs on Tahuata.



*Another gorgeous Blue Lorikeet at the Blue Lagoon in Rangiroa Lagoon (Pete Morris)*

**Eastern Rosella (C) (introduced) *Platycercus eximius*** Three on the access road to the Takitumu Conservation Area.

**Kuhl's Lorikeet ◊ (C) (reintroduced) (Rimatara Lorikeet) *Vini kuhlii* (EN)** See note.

**Blue Lorikeet ◊ *Vini peruviana* (VU)** Good numbers (c50) seen very well at the Blue Lagoon, in Rangiroa Lagoon.

**Ultramarine Lorikeet ◊ *Vini ultramarina* (EN)** Several seen well on Ua Huka, the first at the arboretum.

**Rarotonga Monarch ◊ (C) *Pomarea dimidiata* (VU)** Seen well at Takitumu and on Atiu where introduced 2003-2005.

**Tahiti Monarch ◊ *Pomarea nigra* (CR)** 4+ adults and 2+ juveniles seen well in the Papehue Valley, Tahiti.

**Marquesan Monarch ◊ *Pomarea mendozae* (EN)** Great views of 6+ (males, females and youngsters) on Mohotani [*motanensis*].

**Iphis Monarch ◊ *Pomarea iphis* (VU)** Several seen well on Ua Huka, the first at the arboretum.

**Fatu Hiva Monarch ◊ *Pomarea whitneyi* (CR)** Excellent views of a pair, a juvenile and a subadult in the Omoa Valley.

**Red-vented Bulbul (introduced) *Pycnonotus cafer*** A common introduction on Tahiti and Moorea.

**Pacific Swallow *Hirundo tahitica*** A pair in the Papehue Valley, and one or two others on Tahiti. Distinctive nominate form.

**Northern Marquesan Reed Warbler ◊ *Acrocephalus percernis*** See note.

**Tahiti Reed Warbler ◊ *Acrocephalus caffer* (EN)** Good views of two: a yellow and a brown adult in the Papenoo Valley.

**Southern Marquesan Reed Warbler ◊ *Acrocephalus mendanae*** See note.

**Tuamotu Reed Warbler ◊ *Acrocephalus atyphus*** See note.

**Cook Reed Warbler ◊ (C) *Acrocephalus kerearako* (NT)** Common with many great looks on Mangaia [nominate].

**Silvereye (introduced) *Zosterops lateralis*** Common introduction on Tahiti and Moorea. Also on Makatea [nominate].

**Rarotonga Starling ◊ (C) *Aplonis cinerascens* (VU)** Great views of small numbers at Takitumu Conservation Area.

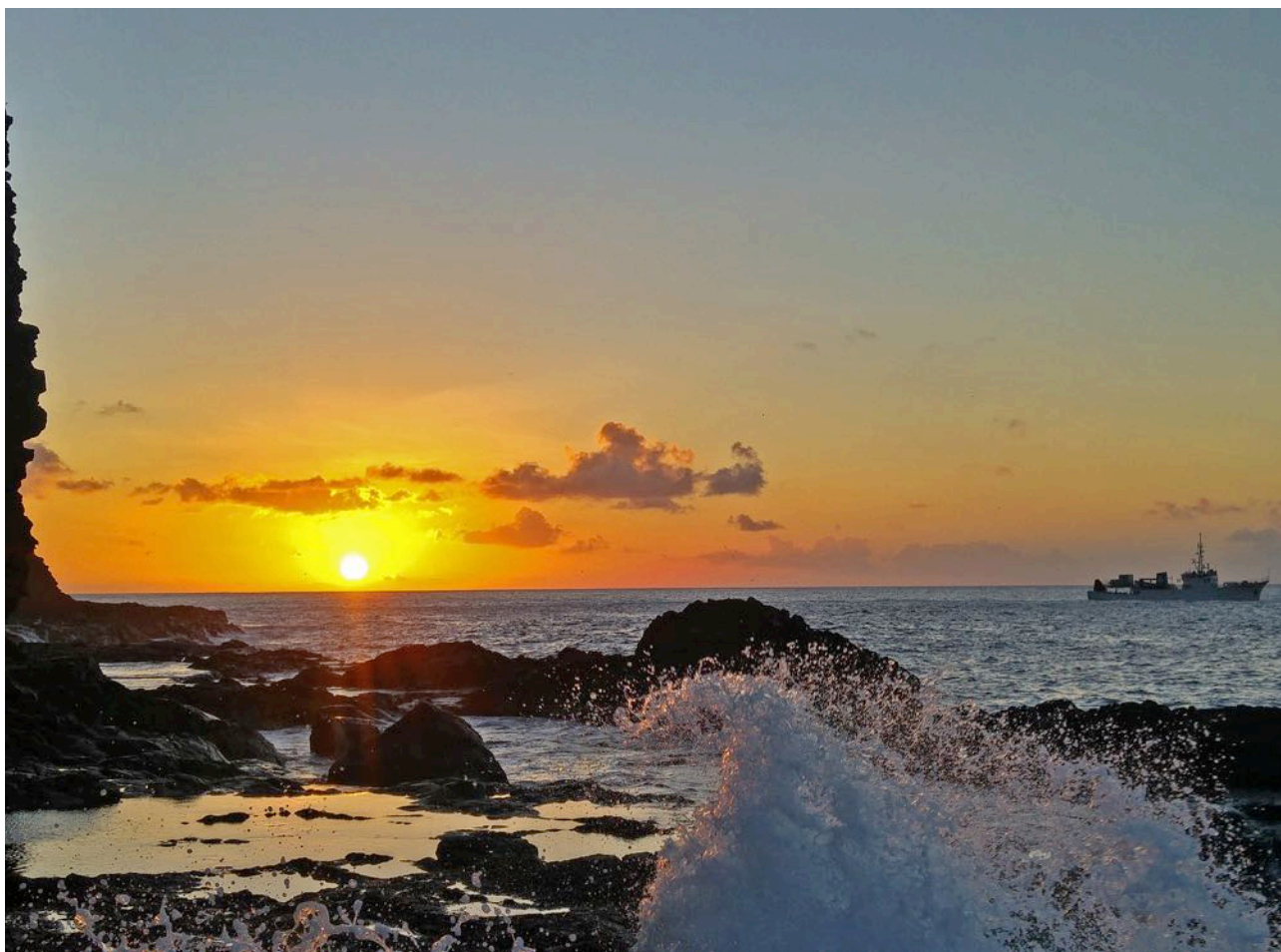
**Common Myna (introduced) *Acridotheres tristis*** A real problem species, thankfully now removed from Atiu [nominate].

**Common Waxbill (introduced) *Estrilda astrild*** A common introduction on Tahiti and Moorea.

**Red-browed Finch (introduced) (R-b Firetail) *Neochmia temporalis*** On Tahiti, Moorea and some Marquesas [nominate].

**Chestnut-breasted Mannikin *Lonchura castaneothorax*** Also on Tahiti, Moorea and some Marquesas.

**Crimson-backed Tanager (introduced) *Ramphocelus dimidiatus*** A handful seen on Tahiti [nominate].



Returning to the Braveheart at sunset; Hatutu Island in the Northern Marquesas (Pete Morris)



Stunning Spinner Dolphins put on a real show on several occasions! (Pete Morris)

#### MAMMALS

**Polynesian Rat** *Rattus exulans* Particularly common on Hatutu.

**House Rat (Black R)** *Rattus rattus* Seen on Tahiti – the region's birds worst enemy!!

**Humpback Whale** *Megaptera novaeangliae* Breaching animals from the Moorea ferry, and also seen off Atiu.

**Common Bottle-nosed Dolphin** *Tursiops truncatus* Great views off Hatutu and again in the Tiputa Pass, Rangiroa.

**Spinner Dolphin (Long-beaked S D)** *Stenella longirostris* Great views on several occasions, bowriding and spinning!

**Domestic Cat (introduced)** *Felis catus* Including a lovely ginger Tom!

**Pacific Flying Fox (Insular F F) (C)** *Pteropus tonganus* Plenty seen well at the Takitumu Conservation Area on Rarotonga.

**Domestic Pig (introduced)** *Sus domesticus* Snorting around Nuku Hiva!

**Feral Goat (introduced)** *Capra hircus* Sadly still present on some islands.

**Feral Horse (introduced)** *Equus ferus* A great find on Ua Huka and a write-in to boot!!



*For those that wished, there was also some great underwater life, including (clockwise from top left) Ornate Butterflyfish; Bluefin Trevally; Lagoon Triggerfish and Orange-lined Triggerfish (Björn Andersson). Below, Matt and Matt collecting us from Makatea (Pete Morris)*



## NOTES TO THE SYSTEMATIC LIST

The most up to date referenced taxonomic lists referred to in the Tour Report is that of the IOC World Bird Names. (Gill, F and Donsker, D Eds). 2017. IOC World Bird Names v7.3. Available at <http://www.worldbirdnames.org>, and Thibault, J-C. & Cibois, A.: Birds of Eastern Polynesia: A Biogeographic Atlas. 2017.

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

Several birds seen and photographed between Fatu Hiva and Rangiroa, and off Rangiroa closely resembled this species. Sadly, most were not close, and seemed to be somewhat boat shy, and given eliminating pale Collared Petrels is far from straightforward, it is difficult to be certain. However, I am pretty confident that several of the birds we saw were Gould's Petrels, presumably of the form *caledonica*.

### **Blue Noddy** *Procelsterna cerulea*

We saw two forms of this attractive species. In the Marquesas we saw the nominate form, first seen as we left Nuku Hiva. The form *teretirostris* was common around Rangiroa Lagoon, with many lovely views.

### **(Little) White Tern** $\diamond$ *Gygis [alba] microrhyncha*

Common in the Marquesas. This distinct form is surely a worthy split, and indeed is split by BirdLife International. They state that it apparently interbreeds with *G. alba* in Kiribati, and possibly east to the Marquesas and that a recent study proposes conspecific treatment, on basis of genetics and morphometrics alone. However, BirdLife treat it as a species based



(Common) White Tern and (Lesser) White Tern... One species? I don't think so and nor do BirdLife. Come on the IOC!! (Pete Morris)



on the following differences: the smaller size, i.e. 23 vs 31 cm in length (based on a small sample of NHMUK measurements); shallower tail notch; more black around eye; whitish versus dark shafts of primaries and bill black, with no blue or only trace at base and markedly narrower. They certainly look pretty different in the field!

**Polynesian Ground Dove** *Alopecoenas erythropterus*

One seen on a small island in the south of Rangiroa Lagoon. The only individual we could locate, despite an extensive search, was a tired and old male, with half a leg missing! This was possibly the last individual from this population – a really sad thought [*albicollis*].

**Lilac-crowned (or Cook Islands) Fruit Dove** *Ptilinopus rarotongensis*

We saw two quite distinct forms of this endemic. The nominate form (Rarotonga Fruit Dove), complete with red belly patch, showed very well at the Takitumu Conservation Area. The somewhat duller form *goodwini* (Atiu Fruit Dove) was also seen very well, including one individual on the nest.

**Makatea Fruit Dove** *Ptilinopus chalcurus*

Good views of several on Makatea. The cap was quite bright, but in general it is a very similar species to Atoll Fruit Dove. Indeed, the recently published biogeographic atlas does not recognize it as a species.

**White-capped Fruit Dove** *Ptilinopus dupetithouarsii*

Again, we saw two reasonably distinct subspecies of this attractive dove. The form *viridor* was seen well in the northern Marquesas (Nuku Hiva and Ua Huka) whilst the nominate form was seen very well in the southern Marquesas (Tahuata, Mohotani and Fatu Hiva). Note that the recently published biogeographic atlas confuses the distribution of these two forms, getting them the wrong way round!



*The two forms: nominate from Mohotani (left) and viridor from Nuku Hiva (Pete Morris)*

**Tahiti Swiftlet** *Aerodramus leucophaeus*

20+ seen well in the Papehue Valley, Tahiti. A rare bird, but lumped with Marquesan Swiftlet by BirdLife International, with the combined species named Polynesian Swiftlet and judged to be of 'Least Concern' in terms of conservation status. However, when treated as a full species (as here) it would be listed as Vulnerable or Endangered. It is only known from five or six valleys and the total population is less than 1000 individuals.

**Kuhl's (or Rimatara) Lorikeet** *Vini kuhlii*

Many great looks on Atiu where the population is doing very well. A real stunner, 27 were reintroduced in 2007 and the species is now thriving (many hundreds already). Fossil and oral traditions indicate that the species was formerly found on at least five of the Southern Cook Islands, including Atiu, so bringing it back to the island has proven a good move.

**Northern Marquesan Reed Warbler** *Acrocephalus percernis*

We saw three forms of this endemic well. The nominate form was common on Nuku Hiva, the form *postremus* was seen in small numbers on Hatutu, whilst the form *idae* was common on Ua Huka.

**Southern Marquesan Reed Warbler** *Acrocephalus mendanae*

Again, we saw three subspecies of this long-billed endemic. The nominate form was seen well on Tahuata, the form *conso-brina* was seen on Mohotani Island though was generally elusive there, and the form *fatuhivae* was seen well on Fatu Hiva.



The nominate form of Northern Marquesan Reed Warbler (above) and nominate (left) and fatuhivae forms of Southern Marquesan Reed Warbler (Pete Morris)





**Tuamotu Reed Warbler** *Acrocephalus atyphus*

Once more, we saw three subspecies of this endemic too. The first birds we saw were nominate birds at the Blue Lagoon, Rangiroa. The form *niauensis* showed well in the coconuts on Niau, whilst the form *eremus* was seen well on Makatea. The latter is quite a distinct form.



The three forms of Tuamotu Reed Warbler: *eremus* (above); nominate (below left) and *niauensis* (Pete Morris)





## APPENDIX 1

### TOP 6 BIRDS FROM THE MAIN TOUR

- 1<sup>st</sup> **MARQUESAN GROUND DOVE**
- 2<sup>nd</sup> **MARQUESAN IMPERIAL PIGEON**
- 3<sup>rd</sup> **BLUE LORIKEET**
- 4<sup>th</sup> **Ultramarine Lorikeet**
- 5<sup>th</sup> **Fatu Hiva Monarch**
- 6<sup>th</sup>= **Niau Kingfisher**
- 6<sup>th</sup>= **Marquesan Monarch**

*It's not often that pigeons claim the two top spots in a bird-of-the-trip vote! Above, Marquesan Ground Dove, and below, the remarkable Marquesan Imperial Pigeon (Pete Morris)*





*Our bird of the trip in the Cook Islands; the glorious Kuhl's Lorikeet (Pete Morris)*

## **APPENDIX 2**

### **TOP 5 BIRDS FROM THE COOK ISLANDS**

- 1<sup>st</sup> KUHL'S LORIKEET**
- 2<sup>nd</sup> MEWING KINGFISHER**
- 3<sup>rd</sup> LONG-TAILED CUCKOO**
- 4<sup>th</sup> Atiu Swiftlet**
- 5<sup>th</sup> Rarotonga Starling**