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Special Issue

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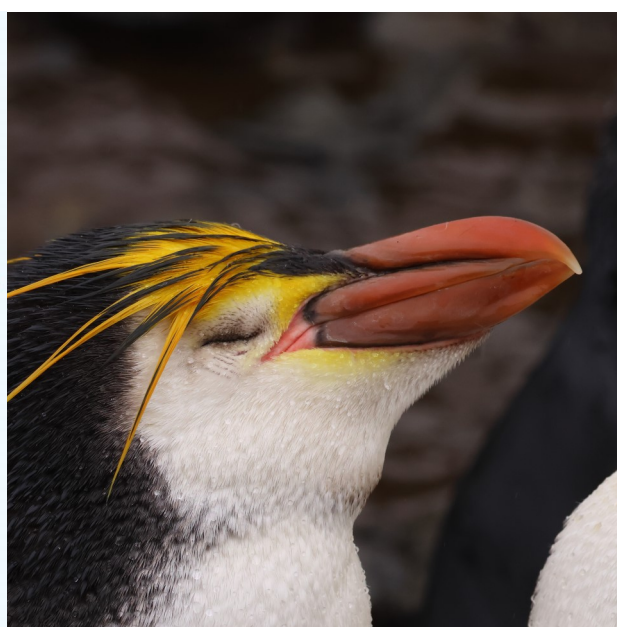
## Way Beyond The Cape - The Sub-Antarctic Islands



### Way Beyond The Cape ...

Something a little special before we resume our nature observations around **The Cape** in 2023.

Do you ever reflect while walking or sitting on the beach and looking out over the beautiful Bunurong coast wondering what lies well beyond the horizon? Although the nearby offshore *Tasmania* and *Bass Strait* islands offer a glimpse of some stunning wild and natural environments, much further beyond, in the southern latitudes of the *Roaring Forties* and *Furious Fifties* of the *Southern Ocean*, well south of the Australian mainland and New Zealand and north of Antarctica, lies a group of islands known as the *Sub-Antarctic Islands*. These latitudes are also known as the *Albatross Latitudes*, comprising many species of these amazing ocean going pelagic birds, along with many unique island based penguin species, flightless teals and endemic shags—amazing animals found nowhere else on our planet. *Cape Chatter* recently had the privilege of visiting these far flung rocky outcrops, places where few people can witness rugged, remote and virtually untouched environments—most listed as World Heritage Areas. So I thought I would share some highlights of the trip, and in this first special edition, we travel to *The Snares*, *Auckland Islands* and Australia's *Macquarie Island*.



*These islands are among the world's wildest places. Some are close to pristine ... though the larger ones have suffered from the introduction of alien animals in the past ... but slowly they have been cleared of introduced fauna and are predator free and mostly uninhabited by humans. The flora and fauna are dependent on the sea ... everywhere the horizon is blue and seemingly endless.*



## *First stop ... The Snares*

Zodiac cruising only, as shore landing is not permitted on The Snares. But we still got the chance to be up close and personal with the flora and fauna on this exquisite rocky, granite wonderland that sits in the Subtropical Convergence providing a uniform temperature range throughout the year. Fauna highlights: NZ Sea Lion, *Cape Petrel*, *Snares Penguin*, *Antarctic Tern* and *Salvin's Albatross*.





## *The Snares continued ...*



Our nearby Phillip Island *Little Penguins* just waddle up the sandy beach with their full tummies as they return to their burrows. Spare a thought for these poor endemic *Snares Penguins* which have to launch themselves out of the water up vertical cliff faces, often in huge swells, to reach their colonies among the clearings of tree daisy forests. *Snares Penguins* will also perch on tree trunks a couple of metres off the ground. They are listed as vulnerable and breed nowhere else in the world.



**Above Left:** *Salvin's Albatross*, listed as vulnerable, is a mid-size *Mollymawk Albatross* which breeds on *The Snares*, but wanders widely through about the Southern Ocean near southern Australia and the western coast of South America.

**Above Right:** The endemic tiny *Snares Island Tomtit* (or *Black Tit*) is thought to have descended from the Australian *Scarlet Robin* —you must wonder how it got to *The Snares*! There are an estimated 500 breeding pairs on the islands.

**Left:** *Antarctic Terns* are tough little sea birds—this is a juvenile. They breed on the Antarctic Peninsula and Sub-Antarctic Islands, including *The Snares*. They are very rare visitors to Australia, and are about half the size of our local *Crested Terns*.





## *Enroute to Australia's Macquarie Island ...*

The next few days included sea time and a stopover at the *Auckland Islands*. The *Auckland's* are home to the endangered *Yellow-eyed Penguin* with an estimated population of 500 pairs. These penguins are quite unusual in that they do not breed in colonies and instead establish their nest away from others.



Locally, we have several species of *Cormorants*, but each of the *Sub-Antarctic Islands* have unique *Shags* endemic to each of the islands. The *Auckland Island Shag* is one of these birds which all have distinctive facial markings.



**Left:** *Yellow-eyed Penguin*, and **above:** *Auckland Island Shag*.

The Albatross latitudes come to life as we sail pass the *Auckland Island* group enroute to *Macquarie Is.* The amazing, graceful and larger *Albatross* like the *Wandering Albatross* and *New Zealand Wandering Albatross*, each with wingspans of some 3 metres, glide effortlessly over the waves following our ship. **Below left:** The NZ *Wandering Albatross* (*spp gibsoni*) is listed as an endangered species, and only breeds on the *Auckland Island*. **Below right:** The critically endangered *Wandering Albatross* has a very small breeding population on *Macquarie Island*





## *Macquarie Island ... a full on experience*

The most southern island of our journey brings us to Australia's *Macquarie Island*—a full on natural world experience in the most remote of places. The island thrusts out of the wild Southern Ocean and is teeming with wildlife. We were lucky enough to encounter good enough weather conditions to zodiac ashore to *Sandy Bay* on the eastern side of the island and take in all that nature could throw at us.



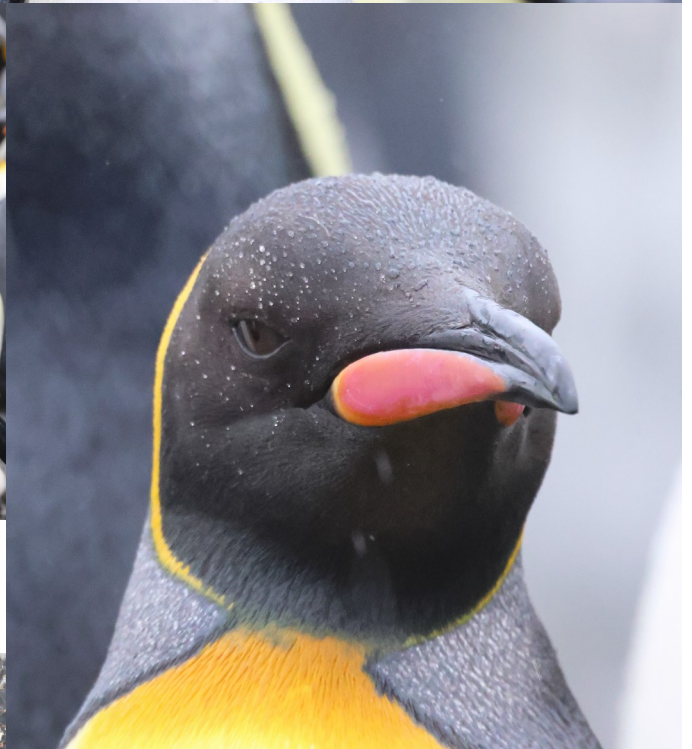
*Macquarie Island* is home to four *penguin* species including the endemic *Royal Penguin*, found no where else in the world, along with the *King Penguin*, *Rockhopper* and *Gentoo Penguins*. Every available beach along the east coast of the island is covered in penguins, which form massive, smelly and very noisy breeding colonies. The picture [above](#) shows mixed groups of *King* and *Royal Penguins* along with scattered *Elephant Seal* at *Sandy Bay*.



## *The Penguins of Macquarie Island ...*



The *King Penguin* (**above** and **right**) along with the endemic *Royal Penguin* (**below**) are the dominant species on the island, where they gather in colonies and breed in the tens of thousands.





## Macquarie Is (continued) ...



**Above:** Young male *Elephant Seals* gather on the sandy beach—belching, farting and fighting like most adolescent males!



The *Cape Chatter* blog is a periodic newsletter produced by resident of **The Cape**, David Hartney. You can subscribe to receive it automatically by email by visiting <https://capechatter.com> and signing up on the Home Page. All photos shown in *Cape Chatter* are taken by David Hartney unless otherwise credited.