

New Caledonia

October 10 – 14, 2024

5 Days / 4 Nights

\$2595*

Single Supplement \$900

Price is for group of 4; See prices for larger / smaller groups on page 4.



The UNESCO World Heritage Site of New Caledonia truly stands out from the others. This group of islands is a biodiversity hotspot with a level of endemism, per square kilometer, seen almost nowhere else on earth. 76% of the country's plant and wildlife species are only found in New Caledonia. A trip to this amazing paradise will give you a birding experience like you've never had before, with easy trails, gorgeous scenery, and an impressive list of exotic endemic species such as Kagu and Horned Parakeet. As on most of our tours, participants will enjoy seeing other wonders of nature in addition to the birds. Although the mammal population is limited to nine species of bats (6 of which are endemic), New Caledonia harbors a plethora of plants, reptiles, amphibians, fish, and other wildlife that are unique.

New Caledonia's rich biodiversity and high endemism are due to its long-isolated evolution, as well as the variety of precipitation levels and very particular ultrabasic soils that cover more than one third of the country. Endemism in the hotspot is especially high among vascular plants. There are about 3,270 plant species recorded on the islands, about 74 percent of which are endemic. Among countries, only Australia, South Africa and Madagascar have more endemic plant families; these nations are vastly larger than New Caledonia. There is an extremely high level of reptile endemism in this hotspot. More than 60 of about 70 terrestrial reptiles are endemic, as are 11 of 23 genera. Nearly all of these species are lizards in two families of geckos and one family of skinks. The best known among these are the giant geckos of the endemic genus *Rhacodactylus*. The New Caledonia giant gecko (*R. leachianus*), the largest gecko in the world, can grow up to 28 centimeters long, and weigh up to 700 grams. Out of more than 100 birds found in New Caledonia, more than 20 are endemic, and we expect to find at least 90% of the endemics on our short tour. There are three endemic genera, two of which are monotypic, including the endangered Kagu, the only living member of the endemic family, Rhynochetidae. Other distinctive bird species include the endemic New Caledonia Imperial-Pigeon (*Ducula goliath*), which is the world's largest arboreal pigeon, and the endemic Cloven-feathered Dove, among many others.

DETAILED ITINERARY

Day 1, October 10: Arrival

Today you will arrive in New Caledonia, where you will transfer to your overnight accommodation in Noumea.
O/N Noumea (Dinner only)

Day 2, October 11: Blue River Provincial Park

We will depart early and spend today exploring Blue River Provincial Park. We could make a few stops along the way as we drive through three native ecotypes: the mining scrub, the rainforest, and wetlands. Blue River is the most popular park in New Caledonia, and undoubtedly the most incredible one. Located in the south of the Grande Terre, the Blue River Park promises truly exotic scenery in a very unusual setting. Nature here has not changed for millions of years! This provincial park of 23,000 hectares is a protected area that provides shelter for some of our most sought-after birds. While **Kagu** is our main target for this park, we will also search for several other very special endemic species: the **New Caledonia Cuckooshrike**, with its powerful whistle creates an exotic atmosphere in the rainforest; the **New Caledonia (aka Goliath) Imperial Pigeon**, the largest tree pigeon in the world; the **Horned Parakeet**, a spectacular large parakeet with prominent “horns” made up of a pair of black feathers with reddish-orange tips; and the critically endangered **Crow Honeyeater**.

The walks in the park are short and easy – the longest walk is only about 1 km. We’ll enjoy a box lunch in order to maximize our time birding in this fantastic park. Other targets for the day include **New Caledonian Myzomela**, **New Caledonian Parakeet**, **Southern Shrikebill**, **Melanesian Flycatcher**, **New Caledonian Friarbird**, **Fan-tailed Gerygone**, **South Melanesian Cuckooshrike**, **Long-tailed Triller**, **Yellow-bellied Robin (aka Flyrobin)**, **Green-backed White-eye**, **Barred** and **Grey Honeyeaters**, and **New Caledonian** and **Rufous Whistlers**. We’ll return to Noumea in time for dinner.

O/N Noumea (BLD)

Day 3, October 12: Giant Tree Fern Provincial Park / Parc des Grandes Fougères

We’ll have another early start today in order to explore another popular park, the Giant Tree Fern Provincial Park (aka Parc des Grandes Fougères). Spanning an area of 4,535 hectares covered with tropical rainforest, the Giant Tree Fern Provincial Park is part of an even vaster forested area belonging to the private domain of the Southern Province. Part of the terrestrial area of the West Coast Zone and listed as a UNESCO World Heritage site, it stretches across sedimentary volcanic earth (schist), at an elevation range of 400 to 700 meters. The park’s dense rainforest displays a huge range of endemic wildlife, including birds. A list drawn up in 2009 by the Institute of Development Research estimated that almost 500 plant species are present in the park, of which 70% are endemic. While it does provide visitors with a unique place of relaxation and discovery, the Giant Tree Fern Provincial Park is also intended to help preserve the plant species it harbors. A renowned place of study for scientists from around the world (botanists, entomologists, ornithologists...) the Giant Tree Fern Provincial Park must also fight against invading species which threaten the forest’s survival.



We will spend about 7 hours in the park, walking 7 km on easy walking paths, with just a few sections that could be considered moderate in difficulty. Here, we hope to find some more special endemics: **Cloven-feathered Dove**, one of the most beautiful of New Caledonia's endemic bird species; **White-bellied Goshawk**,



New Caledonia's only endemic raptor; and **New Caledonia Crow**, known worldwide as one of the most intelligent bird species as it builds tools and can think of several actions in advance in order to achieve a goal.

Other species we hope to see today include **Red-throated Parrotfinch**, **Striated Starling**, and many of the species listed for yesterday's outing. It's always good to get another chance to see an endemic bird or to get a second (sometimes better) look and/or photograph!

When we leave the park in late afternoon, we'll drive to Bourail to stage for tomorrow's birding.

O/N Bourail (BLD)

Day 4, October 13: North Bourail

Today we'll explore the area around Bourail, birding in the mountains and coastline for some endemics not found in the parks we've already visited. The **New Caledonian Grassbird** (aka Thicketbird) is the only bird that cannot be seen in the forest. It's an extremely shy bird, but we should be able to find one in the short bushes and grass. Usually found on the Loyalty Islands, the **Red-bellied Fruit Dove** is now seen in a special place around the Bourail coastline, and our guide will know exactly where we should look. We'll also have another chance to spot the **New Caledonian Crow**, the **White-bellied Goshawk**, and several other endemic species on our route today, increasing our chances of getting terrific views of the birds and taking some photographs. At the end of the day, we'll drive to Noumea for our last night on the island.

O/N Noumea (BLD)

Day 5, October 14: Departure

Today you will transfer to the airport for your flight to Australia to either start the journey home or begin our October 5 - Australia tour.

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PRICING

Group of 8 - \$1995

Group of 7 - \$2145

Group of 6 - \$2295

Group of 5 - \$2445

Group of 4 - \$2595

Group of 3 - \$2745

Group of 2 - \$2895

The price INCLUDES:

- All meals during tour (Dinner on Day 1 through breakfast on Day 5)
- Bottled water
- Private transportation during tour
- All entry fees to reserves in itinerary
- All Lodging
- Expert bilingual bird guide
- Services of 2 ***Cheepers!*** Tour Leaders (Jim & Cindy Beckman)
- Transfers to and from the airport
- Pre-trip gift package, including customized checklist
- Farewell dinner in Noumea
- Post-trip electronic version of final checklist
- Post-trip photo collection on flash drive or DVD

The price does NOT include:

- International airfare
- Tips (Suggested tip is \$10 per person per day for birding guide(s), \$5 per day for driver)
- Items of a personal nature, such as extra drinks, snacks, alcoholic beverages, laundry, souvenirs, etc.

TERMS AND CONDITIONS:

Deposit of \$750 with registration. Balance is due on or before June 1, 2024

Checks should be made payable to ***Cheepers! Birding on a Budget*** and mailed with the registration form to:

Cheepers! Birding on a Budget
Post Office Box 385
Spring Valley, OH 45370