

Exploring the Revival of Okarito Lagoon's Birdlife with Okarito Boat EcoTours on the West Coast, South Island, NZ

For 17 years, Swade and Paula have had the privilege of navigating the serene waters of the Okarito Lagoon, observing its natural beauty and the diverse wildlife it hosts. When asked about the changes they've witnessed over the years, many expect tales of decline. However, their story is one of remarkable rejuvenation and hope.

In the past two years, Swade and Paula have observed a profound resurgence in local birdlife, a transformation they attribute to the dedicated efforts of Zero Invasive Predator (ZIP) South Westland eradication program. The organization's relentless campaign to eradicate rats, stoats, and possums from the forests has led to an unprecedented revival of native bird species and a resurgence of bird song unlike they have heard before.

Each morning now begins with the distinctive calls of fernbirds, highly sought after by bird watchers! The surrounding forests are seeing increases of bellbirds, tui, kereru, tomtits, fantails, South Island robins, kea, kakariki, and kaka. On the tidal flats, the increased presence of banded dotterels hints at positive changes for other wading birds. Notably, sightings of the elusive Australasian bittern have increased from three per season to nine this year, showcasing the effectiveness of ZIP's conservation efforts. And of course the much loved kotuku - Great white heron is always a show stopper and regularly seen here through the season - from November through to May.

Swade and Paula have also noted fascinating changes in bird behaviour. The birds appear more fearless and comfortable around humans, with tomtits frequently landing on their boat and bellbirds boldly singing nearby. One guest on a tour remarked in amazement to Paula, "They are just coming to you – they are all around you!" as warblers, bellbirds, and tomtits flitted around her.

This year, guests of Okarito Boat EcoTours have been captivated by tours that venture deeper into the rejuvenated forests, often expressing that they've never experienced anything like it. Even local tourists, accustomed to quieter forests, are surprised by the vibrant birdlife. Swade and Paula believe ZIP's dedication to restoring the natural environment deserves the highest accolades. Their tireless work in all conditions has breathed new life into the forests, a transformation that Swade and Paula are proud to share with their guests, leaving them with unforgettable memories of the thriving birdlife showcased within the stunning natural beauty of this mountains to sea landscape of Okarito.

A particularly thrilling sighting has been the kakariki. When Swade and Paula first arrived 18 years ago, they were told these birds once thrived around the village, though they had never seen or heard one until this year. Now, a short walk into the forest reveals kakariki in abundance, a testament to the success of the conservation efforts and a source of great excitement.

Swade and Paula's experiences underscore the profound impact that dedicated conservation efforts can have on our natural world. They invite you to join Okarito Boat EcoTours and witness firsthand the extraordinary revival of birdlife in the Okarito Lagoon, a testament to the resilience of nature and the power of human commitment to environmental preservation.

Okarito Boat Ecotours operate from November 01 through May 31st. Please contact us for a product & rates sheet for 2024-2025/26. Products: Daily Okarito EcoTour 9 AM departure (up to 12 passengers) EcoHeritage Tours are available for groups up to 24.







