

March 2016 meeting

Southern voyage yields invaluable experience



Guy MacDonald, 2015 recipient of Forest & Bird's Youth Award, recently returned from a voyage aboard HMNZS Otago.

Guy applied for a place on the Young Blake Expedition which was bound for the Auckland Islands, 360km south of Stewart Island. He was one of 14 youth members chosen, and they were mentored by 14 environmental scientists and workers.

Guy began his PowerPoint photographic presentation with an entertaining video that encapsulated many of his experiences.

The Otago sailed from Auckland on 1 February and pods of dolphins and yellow-eyed penguins were spotted on the journey south. After four days at sea, the Otago anchored at Smith Harbour in the Auckland Islands. A zodiac – amongst other craft - was launched and Guy told us the first underwater video in the region was shot.

They undertook a range of scientific projects. Along the shore, a seaweed survey was done: seaweeds were collected at different sites and later sorted, identified, preserved for DNA analysis, and pressed. Using the marine metre squared technique, all organisms at a number of sites on the rocky shore were

collected for later identification and preservation. Rock samples were also collected. Curious sea lions often popped up in the water nearby as the group carried out their work.

In Norman Inlet, the group towed a plankton net behind a Zodiac to gather plankton specimens. Many different species were later identified and preserved. A seabird survey was undertaken at the same time. Soil samples were taken from a hill behind the proposed research station site. A female sea lion and pup were spotted in the bush.

When the ship anchored at Port Ross, near Enderby Island, there was also time to check out a lookout base which was used during World War 2. At night they used thermal imaging to observe the activity of sea lions and penguins.

At Sandy Bay, on Enderby Island, DOC staff were monitoring the breeding success of sea lions and the yellow-eyed penguin colony. The group walked across the island and a highlight here was the Royal Albatrosses.

On the homeward journey they visited Stewart Island for a spot of fishing and diving. Crayfish, paua, kina, blue cod, tarakihi, and barracuda were caught.

It was an enviable experience for the audience and an invaluable one for Guy. See these links for background information on the expedition, and for Guy's blog:

<http://www.sirpeterblaketrust.org/sub-antarctic-voyage-2016>

<http://www.sirpeterblaketrust.org/posts/2016/02/08/close-encounters-of-the-sea-lion-kind>

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