

P R E S S R E L E A S E

[A rare opportunity to visit one of our planet's most important biodiversity regions](#)

[Orion's expeditions to remote and rarely visited Sub-Antarctic islands](#)

Surrounded by the waters of the Southern Ocean, secluded and seldom visited, the Australian and New Zealand Sub-Antarctic Islands, regarded by UNESCO as one of the world's precious regions of unique biodiversity, will be visited by the luxury expedition cruise ship *Orion* in December 2009 and again in 2010.

Recognised for their volcanic and glacial geological formations and extraordinary diversity of flora and fauna - much of which endangered or still recovering since being plundered in the late 1700's and early 1800's by sealers and whalers - these islands now enjoy World Heritage status.

This area has the highest diversity and abundance of seabirds found anywhere in the world. Over half of the world's seabirds, some of which exist nowhere else, call this region home. 84 species breed in the area, 34 of which breed no-where else in the world. This wildlife paradise contains 40% of the world's albatross species and half the world's penguin species plus hundreds of thousands of other endemic birds - petrels, prions and cormorants. Birds of a feather truly flocking together.

Joining Orion's specialist Expedition Team to assist guests maximise their understanding of the important biodiversity of this region will be a number of guest lecturers including British zoologist and naturalist Dr John Sparks; threatened species ecologist with Birds Australia, Glenn Emke, and Neville Peat, who wrote the 1998 World Heritage Area nomination for the New Zealand Sub Antarctic islands.

With convenient embarkation in Bluff (Invercargill, New Zealand) or Hobart, *Orion* will visit Australia's wildlife sanctuary at Macquarie Island, plus Campbell, Stewart, Snares and Auckland islands as well as spending time exploring New Zealand's beautiful Fjordlands, including Milford Sound with the world's tallest sea cliffs.

The remnants of the old whaling station on Macquarie Island, the high cliffs and numerous caves and arches formed by marine erosion on Campbell Island and the enormous sea stacks on the southern peninsulas of Snares present dramatic contrast to the prolific bird life, penguins, fur and elephant seals, sea lions, killer whales and unique flora seen in this remote region.

These expeditions, with departures in December 2009 and 2010, particularly suit nature lovers and keen wildlife photographers as well as those with a spirit of adventure interested to visit places of outstanding importance yet rarely seen.

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Additional information on the specialist lecturers:

Dr John Sparks

John Sparks developed a life-long interest in birds tramping the coasts of East Anglia. Born in Colchester, Essex, he graduated in Zoology and Marine Biology at London University, then obtained a Ph.D. in bird behaviour under Desmond Morris. Afterwards, he became a Research Fellow at the Zoological Society of London where he extended his studies into Primates.

In 1965, he joined the BBC's illustrious Natural History Unit in Bristol as a Radio Producer, but then moved into television, eventually being one of the Producers of Sir David Attenborough's bench mark series Life on Earth. He was responsible for directing one of television's most memorable episodes of David's encounter with mountain gorillas.

John has travelled all over the world making wildlife films, including five with Sir David Attenborough; he has written 11 books and visited Antarctica on many occasions. Details available at www.johnsparks.org

Neville Peat

Dunedin-based Neville Peat is a leading New Zealand nature writer and interpreter – the author of more than 30 books, most of which explore natural history or environmental/geographical themes. He wrote the 1998 World Heritage Area nomination for the New Zealand subantarctic islands and subsequently produced a popular guidebook to the region.

Glenn Ehmke

Glenn spends much of his professional career as a threatened species ecologist with Birds Australia navigating the shores and coastal wetlands of Victoria, South Australia, Tasmania and New South Wales, running community-based conservation programs and researching coastal birds.

The breeding life of birds is a key interest of Glenn's, and he has published a number of articles on the breeding ecology of Australian shorebirds as well as coordinating the Birds Australia's nest record scheme.

Glenn is a passionate wildlife and landscape photographer and has recently been shortlisted for the ANZANG (Australia, New Zealand, Antarctica and New Guinea) nature photography competition - one of the region's premier nature photography contests. The image shortlisted was actually taken at Stewart Island on last year's Orion New Zealand South Island Expedition - see <http://glenne.zenfolio.com/p266908505/hc75daa4#hc75daa4>

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Orion Fares Guide:

13 night Sub-Antarctic Wildlife Adventure – departs Hobart 1 December 2009 and 8 December 2010 or Bluff (Invercargill) NZ 14 December 2009. Itineraries vary slightly.

Fares from \$10,630 per person twin share for an ocean view Category B stateroom

Suites from \$14,660 per person twin share for a Junior Suite

Owners' Suites with French Balcony are \$22,265 per person twin share

Ranked #2 expedition cruise ship in the world in the current Berlitz Cruise Guide, Orion is the world's latest purpose-built luxury expedition cruise ship, featuring an unmatched range of onboard facilities.

With 75 crew and a maximum of just 106 passengers Orion offers the highest staff to guest ratio and guest to public space ratio of any ship based in Australian waters.

Further information on all Orion Expedition Cruises to Antarctica, Papua New Guinea, Melanesia, Asia, New Zealand, the Kimberley and Arnhem Land can be obtained by visiting the website www.orionexpeditions.com

For reservations or to obtain a brochure call Orion Expedition Cruises: 61-2 9033 8777 (Sydney callers) 1300 361 012 (regional and interstate) or your travel agent. Email: info@orionexpeditions.com

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