

Halfmoon Bay, Stewart Island



Elephant seal, Stewart Island

The Guide to STEWART ISLAND

Ulva Goodwillie is a local islander who is passionate about her home and committed to giving visitors a special insight into Stewart Island's (Rakiura to the Maori people) unique attractions. Ulva bears the name of the lovely Ulva Island bird sanctuary situated in Whaka o Te Wera (Paterson Inlet). A highlight of her walking programme is a leisurely ramble which introduces visitors to the island's history, scenery and spectacular birdlife. As a 'mana whenua' (guardian of the land through ancestral links), Ulva likes to connect visitors to Rakiura's spiritual heritage and its cultural and conservation values.

How long has your family lived on Stewart Island?

Six generations of our family have lived here, since the mid-1800s. On my father's side, Charlie Goodwillie came from the Kingdom of Fife and he married into the Maori people. So too did my mother's side of the family. A lot of the Maori people who live here have English, Scottish, Norwegian, Portuguese and American family names. I now live on Half-Moon Bay on Stewart Island – the main wharf area where the ferry comes in.

Why did you become a guide?

I used to guide for the Department of Conservation, which was only for two months of the year, but there used to be a lot of people that would come to see if someone would guide them to Ulva island. So that was my market research! I'm now going into my 7th year.

What does your work entail on a day-to-day basis?

It's about meeting people. Word of mouth is a wonderful thing and the majority of my birding visitors come from the UK to see the birds that they can't see anywhere else and for the plant life. It's not an army trek, it's an amble through the forest, we stop every five minutes because there's a bird to see and explain.

Why is Ulva Island so special?

Ulva Island gives an idea of how New Zealand used to be. We also have lots of ancient life-forms because Stewart Island is a granite rock whereas the rest of New Zealand is volcanic so we were here first! We have things that the other islands of New Zealand do not have and that's what make us a little bit more special.

Bird watching seems to be the major reason why people come here. We have lots of endemic birds native to this region. But we don't have hundreds of species; it's about quality. Our pelagic bird life is really good, such as albatross and petrels. People also come to see conservation in action. It's also a conservation success story because it's been predator-free for ten years. Since the rats were removed we've been able to bring back the birds that used to be here, such as the Stewart Island saddleback, the Stewart Island robin, the mohua (yellow-head), and the rifleman.

What kinds of plants are there on the Island?

We have a plant called the tmesipteris, which has been carbon-dated to be between 400 and 430 million years old, and we have the Brachyopod, which is a shell form that only exists in pristine marine environments – they're on the beaches of Stewart Island. We also have a podocarp forest (our 'skyscrapers' – ancient, primitive trees that carry their seeds in cones). They are an ancient form of gondwanaland family of trees.

What is the thing you most enjoy about your job?

The fact there are no predators on the island to disturb the life-cycle of the birds and plants. They are in their natural environment. Ulva Island is one of the few areas on Stewart Island that hasn't been milled or logged. It has ancient, primeval forest so it's very easy to show off something that hasn't changed in many centuries.

Richard Hammond is a freelance travel writer who specialises in writing about eco tourism and responsible travel. He is the editor of 'Green Places to Stay' (Alastair Sawday Publishing).

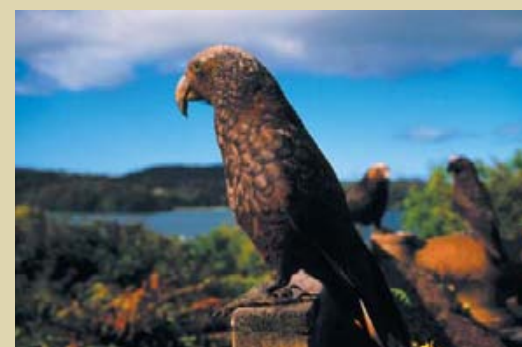


Ulva with guest, Ben Fogle

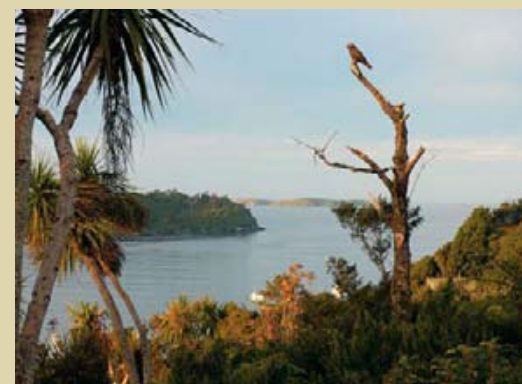
Travel writer, Richard Hammond, talks to Ulva Goodwillie, specialist natural history guide on Stewart Island (Rakiura), off the southernmost tip of New Zealand.



Ulva Island



Cheeky kea, Stewart Island



Stewart Island

FACT FILE

A three week trip to New Zealand including return flights and a three night stay on Stewart Island, with a tour to Ulva Island in the company of Ulva Goodwillie starts from £3,650 per person. For details please contact Sian or Lucy on 01993 838 820.



Kiwi in the wild, Stewart Island