3 Southern Seabird Solutions Fact Sheet

Southern Seabird Solutions

Seabird ecology

What makes a seabird a seabird?

"Ka pā te muri, ka tangi te toroa, ki tōna kāinga i waho i te moana"
When the north wind blows, the albatross weeps for its home far out on the ocean
- Ngāi Tahu, Whakatauki

A manu moana/seabird is simply a bird that spends most of its life at sea. Seabirds forage at sea for food, either by themselves or in flocks.

Most seabirds even rest and sleep at sea on the waves, although some species do come ashore to roost at night.

All seabirds come to land to breed.

Key concepts

adaptation

ika – fish

Manu moana – Seabird

hoiho – yellow-eyed penguin

kororā – little blue penguin

tītī – sooty shearwater

toroa – wandering albatross

toroa-whakaingo – northern royal albatross

Adapted to a life at sea

To live at sea, seabirds have had to adapt to extreme conditions. For instance, many seabird species have denser bones than other birds. Their bone density helps them dive deeper while they're searching for food.

Salty solution

Most seabirds never drink a drop of freshwater in their lives. Instead they drink sea water. This means they build up lots of salt in their bodies that they need to get rid of. Most seabirds have salt glands above their eye sockets. These glands concentrate excess salt from the bird's water and food. When too much salt builds up in the gland the salt flows out or the seabird 'sneezes' it out.

The most common seabirds found in New Zealand are tītī/sooty shearwaters. They are members of the Procellariidae family. This family of birds is known as 'tube-noses' because of the tube on the top of their beak. The nostril tube is used for breathing and smelling, but it's also the way they rid their bodies of salt.

Can you see the 'tube-noses' on this giant petrel and its chick, photo courtesy Tui de Roy, Roving Tortoise

Swim this way

Seabirds have all different lengths of legs and types of feet. Seabirds that spend most of their time on the ocean usually have short, thick legs and webbed feet. They use their short legs like oars and their webbed feet work like paddles.

A sooty shearwater 'flying' underwater. Photo: Kim Westerskov

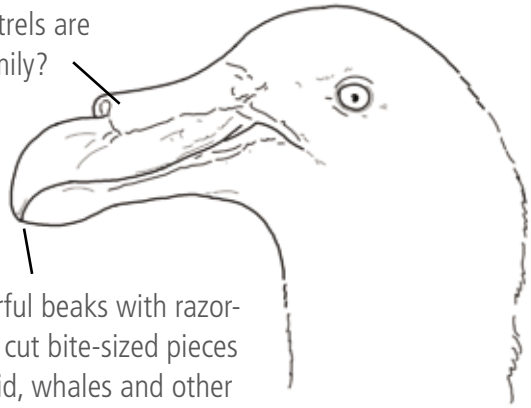
Beaks, beaks, beaks

Most seabirds have a great sense of smell that helps them find food—even when it's kilometres away.

Photo: Tui de Roy, Roving Tortoise

Powerful and razor sharp

Can you see why giant petrels are part of the 'tube-nose' family?



Giant petrels have powerful beaks with razor-sharp sides to help them cut bite-sized pieces off of dead seabirds, squid, whales and other marine creatures.

The sides of a penguin's beak are sharp with rough spines on the inside to help it hold onto fish.

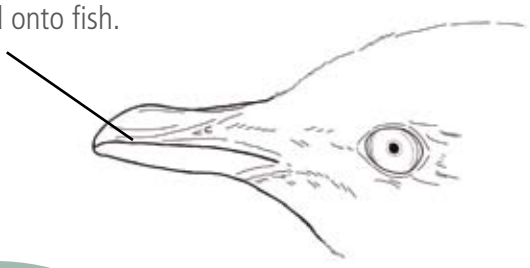


Photo: DOC

Sharp with spines

Photo: DOC

Strong and streamlined

Australasian gannets have beaks that are strong and streamlined with their bodies to help them with their diving.