



Seabirds and people

Seabirds count – seabird populations in New Zealand

Scientists spend time learning how many seabirds there are, where seabirds nest, and details about their breeding, migrating and eating habits. Some of this information helps determine how seabirds are doing.

Going, going, gone?

Throughout New Zealand's history some plants and animals have become extinct. When a species is extinct, there are no more of them alive anywhere in the world.

Māori hunted many of New Zealand's birds and introduced predators like kiore/rats and kurī/dogs. Most people know about moa becoming extinct during this time, but some other birds did too, including the giant Haast's eagle and Scarlett's duck.

With the arrival of Europeans, there were big changes made to the land and sea, along with increased hunting and the introduction of predators like stoats and cats. During this time still more species became extinct, including birds like the huia and piopio.



Placing sooty shearwater in burrow,

photo courtesy DOC, Christine Jacobson

What are we doing to stop seabirds from becoming extinct?

All around New Zealand people are working to help our seabirds. School students are restoring nesting habitats, people are trapping predators, and others are developing ways to keep seabirds away from fishing boats so that the seabirds won't accidentally be caught on hooks or in nets.

Key words

endangered

Aotearoa – New Zealand

ngaro – extinct

tatau – count

Manu moana – Seabird

Chatham tāiko

tarapiroe – black-fronted tern

tara-iti – fairy tern

toroa-whakaingo – northern royal albatross

white-flipped penguin

There are only 40 New Zealand fairy terns in the whole world. How does that number compare to the number of kids in your classroom?

Like the moa

The phrase 'he manu ngaro te moa ināianeī' means the moa is now an extinct bird. Sometimes the phrase is used as a reminder that over-harvesting can lead to extinction, just like what happened to the moa.

Some of New Zealand's most endangered seabirds



A list of some of New Zealand's endangered seabirds

Seabird	Population	Where they nest	Main reason they are endangered
tara-iti/New Zealand fairy tern	critically endangered – 40	Breeds in Northland at Papakanui Spit, Mangawhai and Waipu estuaries.	Predators, disturbance by people, and nesting habitat loss.
toroa-whakaingo/northern royal albatross	up to 20,000	Breeds at the Chatham Islands and Taiaroa Head.	Storms have destroyed their nesting habitat at the Chathams. Longline fishing is also a threat.
white-flipped penguin	about 4,200	Breeds on Motunau Island and at Banks Peninsula, Canterbury.	Introduced predators (especially ferrets and dogs) and near-shore set nets.
tarapiroe/black-fronted tern	between 2,000 and 10,000	Breeds in riverbeds in the eastern South Island.	Introduced predators including ferrets, stoats, rats, hedgehogs and dogs. Loss of nesting habitat.
Chatham tāiko	critically endangered – 100 – 150	Breeds on Chatham Island.	Currently the main threat to the breeding population is intense competition for nest sites with the extremely abundant broad-billed prion.

Count-down at Taiaroa Head

At Taiaroa Head, scientists, volunteers and Department of Conservation staff know every toroa-whakaingo/northern royal albatross in the colony. There are a total of 40 nesting pairs that return to the colony to breed along with 50 single albatrosses.

In a normal breeding year nearly all the nesting pairs successfully lay eggs at Taiaroa Head. In 2005/2006 only 12 eggs were laid. That's a concern for head ranger Lyndon Perriman.

Northern royal albatross pair at nest,
photo courtesy DOC, MF Soper



“Northern royal albatrosses only breed every other year, and each nesting pair puts a lot of energy into raising their chicks over an 11-month period,” he explains. “Because northern royal albatrosses are endangered, every single chick hatched becomes important to the survival of the species.”

Egg numbers at the colony were low for a number of reasons. When the breeding season began five adults returned without their mates. “Unfortunately their partners are most likely dead. Northern royal albatrosses tend to mate with the same partner, so it can take up to three years for them to find another mate,” Lyndon says.

Several pairs that did return did not lay eggs or laid infertile eggs. “Some of the pairs are young and inexperienced at nesting, plus we have an older couple that in human terms seems to be going through a divorce. Hopefully all these birds will survive and return in two years to successfully breed.”



Northern royal albatross guarding chick, photo courtesy DOC, AE Wright

