

Albatross



Linnaeus says...

There are two different species of the royal albatross, Southern (*Diomedea epomophora*) and Northern (*Diomedea sanfordi*).

Southern royals breed on the Auckland and Campbell Islands. The main distinguishing feature is that the Southern royal has more white on its wings than the Northern royal. Some scientists class them as two sub-species rather than separate species.



Who's who

One of the albatross banded by Richdale was named 'Grandma'. 'Grandma' bred at the colony for at least 50 years before dying at sea in 1989, aged at least 62.



Digging deeper...

It takes about 300 days for a Northern royal chick to hatch, eat a whole heap of food and eventually leave the nest.

Incubation and food foraging duties are shared by both parents. This is fortunate as a meal for a three month old infant can weigh as much as two kilograms!



Stat attack

Wingspan: up to 3.3m

Body length: up to 1.2m

Weight: about 8-9kg

500 – what a great achievement! 70 years after the area was fenced off from the public the Taiaroa Head albatross colony has celebrated the hatching of the 500th Northern royal albatross chick - 'Toroa'. The grandson of 'Grandma', our most famous Northern royal, Toroa is now fully fledged and on his maiden voyage out at sea.

Otago naturalist Lance Richdale first observed the albatross breeding at Taiaroa Head in 1920 and despaired for many years about the eggs being removed by nearby residents. In 1937 the breeding area was finally fenced off from the public, allowing two proud albatross parents to raise the colony's first chick.

The clearing of scrub by people in the mid to late 1800s first attracted the albatross to Taiaroa Head. This barren clifftop that catches the wind from every conceivable angle hardly constitutes prime real estate for you or me but provides our majestic Northern royals with exactly what they need. The strong winds provide the uplift that they require to get airborne and they prefer to nest on fairly barren ground. From the carpark, the café, or the paid tour, it is an exhilarating experience watching these birds soaring skywards when the wind is right.

The Northern royals have been here for a little over 100 years – where did they come from? They nest mainly on the Chatham Islands (800km east of Christchurch) and usually return to nest at their birthplace. Around 7,000 pairs breed there, some of which made their way to the Mainland to establish our colony. It is now estimated to be over 100 strong and is the only albatross colony close to a major city in the world.



Albatross parents take turns looking after their chick



Toroa is fitted with a transmitter

