

Fun Facts About Wildlife in New Zealand

That's right, New Zealand isn't just all about the sheep... Learning about how wildlife evolves on an isolated set of islands in the South Pacific is just an added bonus to backpacking around New Zealand. Museums, wildlife sanctuaries and conservation centres will educate you on New Zealand's fascinating wildlife mostly made up of birds, reptiles, insects and not to mention the marine wildlife!

With no land predators, except for birds of prey, birds in New Zealand evolved into a mix of flightless birds and melodic forest birds. As a result, you may find that many birds in New Zealand are likely to come to check you out when hiking in the forests as they don't see you as a threat. Another part of New Zealand wildlife is reptiles. Reptiles are a little more elusive, made up with the likes of geckos and the tuatara known as the "living fossil" or "living dinosaur". In the ocean waters, a boat trip is often accompanied by dolphins and sometimes whales, seals, eels and stingray are also abundant in New Zealand's waters.

Spoiler: We will also answer the question "Are there snakes in New Zealand?" in this article.

1. New Zealand Has Only One Type of Native Land Mammal

The long-tailed and short-tailed bat are the only types of native land mammal in New Zealand. Birds and reptiles dominate New Zealand's land wildlife. However, introduced land mammals like rabbits, stoats, possums, cats, dogs, rats, etc. are a huge threat to native New Zealand wildlife and are therefore considered a pest. The two species of bat usually feed on New Zealand bugs that are plenty (You'll see below).



2. There are Six Different Species of Penguin in New Zealand

Out of the world's 17 different penguin species, six of them live and breed in New Zealand! The most common species seen when travelling around New Zealand are the little blue penguins, yellow-eyed penguins and Fiordland-crested penguins. To increase your chances of seeing wild penguins in a non-intrusive way is to go on a wildlife-spotting tour. Find out where to see penguins in the [8 Best Places to See Penguins in New Zealand](#).



3. New Zealand is Home to the World's Heaviest Insect

Have you heard of the crazy New Zealand Bugs? The giant weta is the heaviest insect in the world. It has been recorded to be heavier than a sparrow. There are 70 types of weta in New Zealand and can be found in caves and forests. The best time to see them is when walking in the forest at night.



4. There are No Dangerous Animals in New Zealand...

Unlike New Zealand's neighbours, Australia, there are no animals out here that are out to kill you. While New Zealand wildlife is quite safe, there is, however, three types of spider that can hurt if they bite (which is a rare occurrence): the white-tailed spider, redback spider and the katipo spider.



5. ... But Kea Will Pull Your Car Apart

The kea is a cunning native parrot that is famous for ripping rubber seals in cars apart, as well as windscreen wipers. They are the world's only alpine parrot, so you are likely to see these intelligent birds in mountainous environments in the South Island. They are commonly seen on the road to Milford Sound and Arthur's Pass.



6. There are No Snakes in New Zealand

Are there snakes in New Zealand? It is probably one of the most asked questions we receive when it comes to wildlife. Again, unlike Australia, there are no snakes in New Zealand! That's right, New Zealand is one of those rare islands without native snakes. It is, however, home to several species of lizard! So, travel with peace of mind knowing that New Zealand snakes are not a thing.



7. The South Island is Home to a Carnivorous Snail

The powelliphanta is the largest carnivorous snail in the world. As we mentioned before, there are no dangerous animals in New Zealand, but a flesh-eating snail is worth mentioning. They can grow as large as a man's fist and suck up worms like spaghetti. They are no threat to humans, only to worms and New Zealand bugs. You can find them in the South Island in Haast and Fiordland National Park.



8. New Zealand Used to Have Giant Birds

The moa was a giant species of bird that were known to have grown 3.6m (11.8ft) in height and weighing around 230kg (507lbs). They shortly became extinct after the humans starting migrating to New Zealand because they were an easy kill and a large meal... Many museums across the county have moa bones and skeletons on display to appreciate the size of these birds.



9. Tuatara are a Living Descendant of the Dinosaur Era and They Happen to Have a Third Eye

Tuatara is a native lizard in New Zealand that comes from a distinct lineage, the order Rhynchocephalia – an order that thrived around 200 million years ago. They are often described as "living fossils" because they have retained many characteristics from species that were alive during the dinosaur era. The tuatara also has a third eye known as a parietal eye on the top of its head. It is possible to see tuatara in captivity and in wildlife sanctuaries as part of breeding programmes all over New Zealand. The most famous tuatara is Henry who became a father for the first time aged 111. You can visit Henry at the Southland Museum.



10. Kiwi Birds Can Hold Eggs That Take Up 20% of Their Body and Have a Great Sense of Smell

There are heaps of fascinating facts about kiwi birds, which makes them New Zealand's national icon. Among some of those facts are that female kiwi lay one of the world's largest eggs in proportion to body size. Plus, kiwis are the only bird to have nostrils at the end of their bill to smell for insects in the ground. To see a kiwi for yourself, check out [Where to See Kiwi Birds in New Zealand](#).



Finish these sentences

1. New Zealand's wildlife is mostly made up _____
2. A boat trip is often accompanied _____
3. The only native land mammals in New Zealand _____
4. Introduced land mammals like _____
5. The best way to see penguins without disturbing them _____
6. The giant weta has been recorded _____
7. It can be found _____
8. There are three types of spider that bite: _____
9. The kea is famous for _____
10. These parrots live _____
11. New Zealand is one of those _____ However, _____
12. The powelliphanta _____ It eats _____
13. The moa became extinct _____
14. The tuatara is _____ It has _____
15. The female kiwi _____
16. The kiwi is the only bird _____

