



80th birthday taking flight.

Birthday cake, chocolate fish and squid rings will be on the menu at the Royal Albatross Centre during September 2018, as they celebrate the 80th anniversary of the first albatross chick fledging from the newly established colony in 1938.

CEO, Otago Peninsula Trust, Robyn McDonald says “80 years ago a conservation hero, Lance Richdale, camped out alongside an albatross chick at Taiaroa Head throughout the eight months of its growth until it fledged in September 1938. Thus began the establishment and success of the world’s only mainland colony of royal albatross.”

Richdale was a school science advisor, known to the local children as the Nature Study Man. As well as being a gifted teacher, he was a meticulous observer of wildlife. His study of albatross and yellow eyed penguins on the Otago Peninsula, and penguins on the sub Antarctic islands, led to numerous scientific papers on albatross and two books on penguins.

As well as guarding that very first chick, Richdale also succeeded in having the albatross breeding area on Taiaroa Head fenced in 1938, a major factor in the protection of the birds.

As Ecotourism Manager, Royal Albatross Centre, Hoani Langsbury explains “Visitors will be offered treats and deals as we celebrate this very special year with a month long party in September. All the people and organisations who have worked so hard over the years to ensure the success of the albatross colony will be invited. Partnerships between people who realised the importance of the albatross and other wildlife in Dunedin so long ago have led to Dunedin now being recognised as the Wildlife Capital of New Zealand, and New Zealand as the Seabird Capital of the World.”

The albatross colony has grown from one breeding pair and three non-breeding birds in 1937, to around 65 breeding pairs and at least 130 non-breeding birds in 2018. Now that introduced predators are under control, over 20 different kinds of birds breed on Taiaroa Head. This includes the only mainland colony of the endangered red-billed gull in New Zealand not in decline, and below the observatory, a colony of the rare Otago shag. It’s estimated that Taiaroa Head is home to about 10,000 birds now.

The Department of Conservation manages the albatross colony. The Royal Albatross Centre supports the work of DOC on Taiaroa Head and has a concession to run tours in the reserve.

In 1972 when the Minister of Tourism opened the albatross colony lookout for tours he said “Thanks to collaboration between the Otago Peninsula Trust, the Otago Harbour Board, the local branch of the Royal Society, the Department of Lands and Survey and the Department of Internal Affairs, agreement has been reached so that all members of the public who wish to see the birds may now do so from this very fine observatory. At the same time this unique natural resource is preserved for future generations.”

In 1972, 2400 people took a tour to see the albatross. By 2011 a million people had visited, and now well over 100,000 people visit every year, with 30-40% taking a tour. While the Royal Albatross Centre is Dunedin’s foremost conservation project, operating an iconic visitor attraction on the headland can be challenging as Robyn explains “It costs the charitable trust a huge amount to fund the free visitor centre with tens of thousands of dollars spent annually just to provide water and toilet facilities. We have to truck the water in and the sewage out. Otago Peninsula Trust is dedicated to ensuring that we preserve and enhance the Otago Peninsula for all to enjoy, and we appreciate the help of all our supporters for over 50 years, including the huge contribution from service clubs like Rotary and Jaycee to projects, including the opening of the Royal Albatross Centre in 1989.”

Otago Peninsula Trust, New Zealand’s first private charitable conservation trust, was formed in 1967 by the Dunedin Jaycee Chapter. Looking at tourism options for the city, the Jaycees had a ‘eureka!’ moment when they realised that Otago Peninsula was Dunedin’s major asset. The Trust’s purpose is to protect and enhance Otago Peninsula, allowing visitors to enjoy the wildlife and landscape, but with a strong emphasis on conservation. Let’s celebrate this pioneering ecotourism venture.

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Fast Facts:

Otago Peninsula Trust was formed in 1967 and is New Zealand's first private charitable conservation Trust. The Trust is a major ecotourism operator, hosting over 200,000 visitors annually to its award winning enterprises. To achieve its objectives the Trust oversees the business operations and marketing of:

- The Royal Albatross Centre at Taiaroa Head; The world's only mainland Royal Albatross breeding colony
- Historic Fort Taiaroa, underground fortifications with world's only fully restored 1889 Armstrong disappearing gun
- Glenfalloch Woodland Garden. Stunning 1871 historic garden. Seasonal displays.
- Glenfalloch Restaurants; Top 10 Dunedin Restaurant. Dining, Weddings, functions and conferences.
- Fletcher House, Edwardian villa built in 1909 by Sir James Fletcher (management contract)
- Pukekura Blue Penguins, World's smallest penguin, evening penguin viewing tours (joint venture)
- Education Programmes: Interactive student focussed LEOTC in natural environments.

<http://otagopeninsulatrust.co.nz/>

Fast Facts**Royal Albatross**

- Northern royal albatross/toroa are an icon of Dunedin with a conservation status of 'at risk - naturally uncommon'. They are a taonga species for Ngāi Tahu.
- With a wingspan of over three metres, northern royal albatrosses are among the largest seabirds in the world.
- The Pukekura/Taiaroa Head albatross colony is the only mainland place in the world to view northern royal albatross in their natural habitat.
- DOC manages the albatross colony with the support of the Otago Peninsula Trust, Te Poari a Pukekura (Pukekura Co-management Trust) and Dunedin City Council. 10,000 seabirds also thrive at Pukekura/Taiaroa Head, including nationally vulnerable and threatened species like red-billed gulls and Otago shags.
- You can watch the Royal cam albatross chick live on <http://www.doc.govt.nz/royalcam>.
- The first reported albatross egg was laid in 1919.
- Albatross breed once every two years and have one chick.

