



## First albatross chick for 2019 hatches

The first chicks of the 2018/19 breeding season for the Royal Albatross Colony at Pukekura were welcomed today with three newly hatched chicks seen by DOC Rangers. In a Dunedin tradition a “Happy Birthday” flag flies from the Dunedin City Council’s Mayoral Flagpole to celebrate the beginning of an exciting time for the city.

DOC Ranger Jim Watts says ‘A record 51 eggs were laid, and while not all were viable, we are hopeful a high number will hatch successfully this season’.

Otago Peninsula Trust Ecotourism Manager, Hoani Langsbury says “This is a wonderful time to visit the colony as there are several nests within view of our exclusive observatory on the nature reserve. The gorgeous fluffy chicks are eagerly awaited by all our team who love the birds and enjoy sharing with visitors the exhilaration of seeing awesome albatross. Ecotourism contributes well over \$100 million to the Dunedin economy and our famous royals are a unique attraction for Dunedin”.

Hoani adds “Fans have been avidly watching the internationally famous Royalcam couple LGL and LGK waiting for the new chick to hatch which we expect around the 24<sup>th</sup> January. Watchers have also been entertained by non-breeding albatross busy looking for partners, courting and partying. DOC’s Royalcam has made a huge difference to people’s engagement with albatross and the support we are able to give DOC”.

“The generosity of visitors to the colony and donations from a Givealittle page set up by the Otago Peninsula Trust will directly benefit the albatross conservation effort at Pukekura/Taiaroa Head. Last year we replaced the irrigation system used to cool the albatrosses on hot, dry days by upgrading the piping to endure the increasingly extreme weather conditions”, says Jim Watts.

Last year extreme weather conditions resulted in a higher than usual number of failed nests and just 13 chicks fledged. Summer heat can be a challenge for the nesting adults and young chicks as overheating and fly strike can cause mortality. DOC Rangers work longer hours over this crucial time to ensure the best chances for successful hatching. Fly strike, where flies lay their eggs and hatch maggots on hatching albatross eggs or chicks, heat stress and infections are major risks and constant monitoring is essential.

Otago Peninsula Trust General Manager Robyn McDonald says “We’re concerned about increasingly hot summers and the effect it has on albatross chicks. Otago Peninsula Trust helps with care for the albatross on very hot days by providing water for the nest irrigation system. All our water is trucked in, which costs us around \$40,000 each year. We raise funds for water and support to ensure we are able to assist the Department of Conservation to keep albatross and chicks cool on blistering hot days. Trust staff volunteer up to 80 hours through the year to help DOC Rangers with albatross care including weighing, supplementary feeding and pest control”.

149 albatross have been spotted this season since September with 6 birds returning for the first time since fledging 4-10 years ago. Many unsuccessful 17/18 parents have returned to try again. Breeding usually takes place on a two-year cycle, however birds whose nests fail sometimes return the following season to breed again and this is the reason for this year’s increased nest and egg numbers.

Royalcam <https://www.doc.govt.nz/royalcam>

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## BACKGROUND

### Albatross at Pukekura

The colony is home to around 250 albatross who, once mature, breed every two years. Overall there have been more than 650 chicks fledged from Pukekura since the first chick was successfully reared in 1938.

Pukekura albatrosses are unique in that their colony is the only place in the world where a mainland breeding colony can be viewed:

- Northern Royal Albatross is a taonga species, valued and admired by New Zealanders and international visitors
- Viewing iconic royal albatrosses at Pukekura contributes to the \$100 million eco-tourism in Dunedin.
- Otago Peninsula Trust, Dunedin's pioneering ecotourism operator, began albatross tours in 1972 at the Royal Albatross Centre. The Trust, formed in 1967, celebrated its 50<sup>th</sup> birthday in 2017.
- Northern Royal Albatross are one of the world's largest seabirds, with a wingspan of up to three metres. One of the longest living birds in the world, regularly living into their 40s. Average lifespan is 25
- Albatross spend 80% of their life at sea, returning only to land to breed.
- Eggs laid October/November. Incubation time 75-86 days (average 79) Chicks raised Jan/Feb to Aug/Sept/Oct
- Albatross top speed is around 110kph
- Northern Royal Albatross Body Length 1.2metres approx, Weight 6-8 kilograms

#### 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:

- 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 viewing tours (joint venture Korako Karetai whanau)
- Education Programmes: Interactive student focussed LEOTC in natural environments.

<http://otagopeninsulatrust.co.nz/> 50 Stories podcasts:

#### Royal Albatross at Pukekura statistics

	2018/19 at 21 Jan 2019	2017/18	2016/17
Nests	43	27	33
Eggs laid	51	33	36
Fertile Eggs	39	26	29
Albatross Returned	149	135	145
Adolescent birds 1 <sup>st</sup> time return	6	3	14
Chicks fledged – Sept/Oct		13	23