

Why Do Seabirds Nest at Taiaroa Head?

Located at the very end of the Otago Peninsula in Dunedin, Taiaroa Head is home to over 10,000 birds including royal albatross, blue penguins, red billed gulls and shags. But what makes this headland such a suitable place for them to live and breed?

Look at a chart of the Otago Peninsula and check out the [Royal Cam](#) to list the features of the area.

Fill out the table below to link the question we have asked to the feature of Taiaroa Head that it applies to and learn why the headland is such a good nesting site.

Questions	Features of Taiaroa Head
1 What do seabirds feed on?	
2 What weather conditions suit them?	
3 Why do most seabirds nest on islands?	
4 What predators threaten seabird eggs and chicks?	
5 What is the vegetation like? Has it changed over time?	
6 How can we protect seabirds?	

Surrounded by the sea

Taiaroa Head almost looks like an island at the end of the peninsula, surrounded by ocean on almost every side. A lot of seabirds, especially other albatross, nest on remote islands very far from any mainland as it is much easier to access food and is far from predators and other disturbances. All of the seabirds at Taiaroa Head have their food right at their doorstep for them to utilize, and the water is always very cold and nutrient rich.

Always windy

New Zealand sits in a very windy spot in the Southern Hemisphere, right between 40° and 60°, meaning we often have pretty rough and highly variable weather. Taiaroa Head is extremely rugged and is always exposed to this rough and windy weather – which the seabirds love! This makes for very easy takeoff and landing when coming and going from the headland to gather food or to feed a hungry chick waiting in the nest.

Predator control

There are many different introduced mammalian predators here in New Zealand, including rats, cats, stoats and ferrets. Department of Conservation (DOC) have a very intense predator control and trapping system all across the headland, meaning the birds have a much bigger chance of reaching breeding age and then successfully raising their own young.

Humans arrived first!

The Maori people were the first to arrive to Taiaroa Head, and they cleared a lot of lowland coastal scrub and trees to build their pa site (fortified village). Next to arrive were the military who cleared further trees to build underground fortifications in the 1880's. It wasn't until 1919 that the first albatross arrived to the headland after it was cleared and made a suitable nesting habitat for them – the world's largest seabird and large trees don't mix!

Wildlife Reserve

Taiaroa Head is a Nature Reserve, meaning it is a highly protected area for the benefit of every native bird and marine mammal living within it. There is very limited access into the reserve (guided access only) which helps to greatly reduce human impact and disturbance to nesting birds, and the predator trapping occurring within also makes a huge difference. Originally when albatross arrived about 100 years ago – when the headland wasn't protected – the albatross were unsuccessful in their breeding attempts due to interference by introduced mammalian predators as well as people. It was only after protection began in the late 1930's that eggs survived to hatch and chicks survived to fledge.