Wildlife

New Zealand has many unique animals, found nowhere else in the world. When the ancient supercontinent Gondwana broke apart and the islands of New Zealand were formed, many plants and animals were left to develop in isolation.

Marine Life

Nowhere in New Zealand is more than 130 kilometres from the sea. The coastal waters include countless bays, inlets, harbours and estuaries which support hundreds of fish species and marine invertebrates, many unique to the region. Marine mammals include whales, seals and dolphins. Hector's dolphin is endemic to New Zealand and is one of the smallest marine dolphins in the world.

Flightless Birds

With no natural predators, many birds lost the use of their wings. New Zealand ended up with more native flightless birds than any other country. The most famous of these is the kiwi, after which New Zealanders are now named. Others include takahe, weka, moa, three flightless wrens, two adzebills, as well as several species of penguins. Some birds, such as the kakapo, are critically endangered. Others, such as the moa, are already extinct.

Check It Out

Do a search of New Zealand’s flightless birds and list five that are endangered and five that are already extinct.

Famous Kiwi Fun Fact

The female kiwi lays her eggs and her mate incubates them for eleven weeks, the longest known incubation period of any bird. The kiwi is classified as at risk. There are approximately 68,000 kiwi left in New Zealand.
Threats to Wildlife

Bats are New Zealand’s only native land mammals. When the Maori arrived in New Zealand, they brought dogs and Polynesian rats with them. Due to these animals, and also hunting and deforestation, many native species were extinct by the time Europeans arrived. The Europeans brought with them even more predators such as cats, ferrets, weasels, deer, goats and possums, which further decimated native wildlife.

Other threats to native wildlife include deforestation, for timber, mining and farmlands, and the overfishing of waters around the coast. Some marine mammals are endangered, after their numbers were reduced due to whaling and sealing. But now, newer threats such as climate change, ocean pollution and net fishing impact on their environment.

Wildlife Warrior Activity

Choose one native New Zealand animal and research what is being done to protect it. Can you think of any other ways to protect this animal?

Fact Box

There are no poisonous snakes or spiders in New Zealand, apart from the katipo (an endangered spider).