

New Zealand's Unique Wildlife — Knowledge Organiser

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Key facts

- Because New Zealand was isolated for millions of years, many of its animals are found nowhere else.
- With no land mammals to hunt them, several birds — like the kiwi and the kakapo — lost the ability to fly.
- The tuatara is a reptile that has barely changed in over 200 million years — a 'living fossil'.
- Many native species are now endangered.

Key vocabulary

- Native / endemic — found naturally only in one place.
- Flightless — unable to fly.
- Endangered — at risk of dying out.
- Predator — an animal that hunts others.

Why so unusual?

For millions of years New Zealand had almost no land mammals, so birds filled the roles mammals played elsewhere — feeding on the ground and, in some cases, losing flight altogether.

Under threat

When people arrived, they brought animals like rats, cats and stoats, which hunt native birds and their eggs. Flightless birds cannot easily escape, so New Zealanders work hard to protect them — guarding nests and creating predator-free islands.