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WILD LIFE

AN ANIMAL HISTORY OF AOTEAROA

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Wild Life: An Animal History of Aotearoa is a book about the astonishing range of creatures in Aotearoa New Zealand, many of them found nowhere else in the world. Some are native, some are endemic and others are introduced, giving rise to the question: what do those terms mean?

Which animals, birds and marine creatures have been here the longest and how have they adapted over time? Which others lived here but have disappeared, and why did that happen? How and when did non-native animals and birds get here? Why were they introduced? Was their introduction a good thing or a bad idea?

This book includes stories about dinosaur life, the amazing tuatara, some animals that have not survived such as Haast's eagle and huia, introduced pests, livestock and domestic pets, the tiniest creatures that are often overlooked and other animals that have become celebrities. All these wildlife stories have helped to colour the culture and identity of today's Aotearoa New Zealand.

ACTIVITY 1

Choose a migratory animal or bird and record its journey on a map. For example, you could track a humpback whale, eel/tuna, whitebait, Eastern bar-tailed godwit/kuaka, Arctic tern or a shining cuckoo/pipīwharau.

Choose one creature featured in the book and find out more about it. Where does it live? How has it adapted to its environment?

Write down five things you have learned about your chosen creature from this book or elsewhere.



ACTIVITY 2 YOUR LOCAL COMMUNITY

- Is there a **MUSEUM** or a **WILDLIFE SANCTUARY** in your local area? Visit it if you can, or look online to see what information there is about wildlife that lives or once lived in your local area.
- Are there **VOLUNTEER GROUPS** doing pest control or other conservation activities in your neighbourhood? Find out what work they are doing and see if anyone might be available to come and talk to you about what they do.
- Look at **BIRD OF THE YEAR** and similar competitions to see how they work. Design your own poll for your community. Choose a shortlist and ask people to vote for their favourite. Write a press release about the winner.

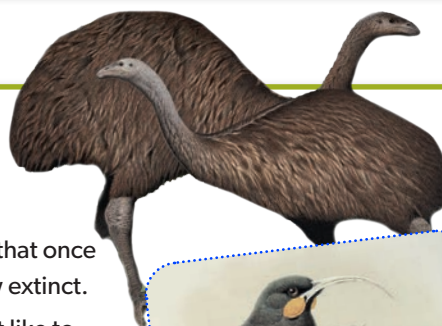


Zealandia.



ACTIVITY 3

- Name **FIVE** animals or birds that once lived in Aotearoa but are now extinct.
- WHICH** one would you most like to see again, and **WHY**?



ANIMAL OR BIRD

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

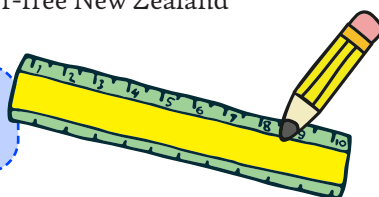


ACTIVITY 4

DRAW A TIMELINE that includes some important moments in New Zealand wildlife history. Some examples are:

- 1200–1300 first Polynesian explorers arrive in Aotearoa
- 1769–70 James Cook's first expedition
- 1843 Richard Owen names the moa *Dinornis novaezealandiae*
- 1894 Richard Henry appointed first caretaker of Resolution Island Tau Moana
- 1948 Geoffrey Orbell finds and photographs takahē
- 1972 Joan Wiffen discovers the 'Valley of the Dragons' in Hawke's Bay
- 1983 Old Blue (black robin) dies aged 14
- 2011 Happy Feet arrives in Peka Peka
- 2012 Scientist Sir Paul Callaghan describes his vision of a predator-free New Zealand

1200–1300
First explorers
arrive here




Happy Feet.



ACTIVITY 5

- **WHEN** and **WHY** were non-native animals introduced to Aotearoa New Zealand?
- **COPY** this table and fill in your answers. We've provided one example.



| Name | Date of introduction if known | Why introduced | Impact for good | Impact for bad |
|------|--|-------------------------------------|--|---|
| Cats | Came with early explorers and settlers | Pets and rat catchers on board ship | Cats are easy to look after and make good companions | Cats are a threat to native wildlife. They kill birds and lizards |
| | | | | |
| | | | | |



DISCUSSION

THE FUTURE

In 2012, Sir Paul Callaghan gave a speech about his 'moonshot' vision for a predator-free New Zealand. 'It can be done, it's crazy, it's ambitious and I think it might be worth a shot,' he said. 'I think it's our great challenge, we should be the country that achieves the seemingly impossible.'

- Discuss what you think Sir Paul meant by a 'moonshot vision'?
- Discuss whether you think making Aotearoa New Zealand predator-free is possible or impossible? Is it a 'crazy' idea? Is it 'worth a shot'?



CREATIVE INTERPRETATION

The following activities require you to use your **IMAGINATION** to help you draw out a deeper understanding of the importance of wildlife in New Zealand.

LETTER

WRITE a **letter** to someone in another country who has never seen our native wildlife. Choose one native animal and **DESCRIBE** it.

POEM

Denis Glover's famous poem 'The magpies' uses the magpies' call as the chorus in his story about the hard life of farmers Tom and Elizabeth:

www.nzonscreen.com/title/the-magpies?collection=nz-poetry

teara.govt.nz/en/natural-sounds/17152/nesting-white-backed-magpies

Write your own poem that includes an animal and the sound it makes.



POSTER/DRAWING

Look at these Department of Conservation posters of types of protected animals, including sharks, rays, turtles, corals, mammals and seabirds.

DRAW your own poster of a protected or endangered native creature.

www.doc.govt.nz/our-work/conservation-services-programme/csp-resources-for-fishers/protected-marine-species-posters/



DEBATE

TOPIC Should the kiwi be the national symbol of Aotearoa New Zealand?

www.stuff.co.nz/national/71233953/the-kiwi-why-is-it-our-national-icon

www.birdful.org/why-is-kiwi-the-national-bird/



RESEARCH

Use Papers Past and DigitalNZ to search for articles, photographs, audio and video about native and introduced animals and birds. Under 'Magazines and Journals' on Papers Past, look for titles such as Forest & Bird and Transactions & Proceedings of the Royal Society of New Zealand.

Use keywords such as specific names of animals, acclimatisation, introduction, extinct and endangered. You might want to combine your topic search with places in the area where you live.

paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/

digitalnz.org/

FORMAL WRITING

Learning how to turn lots of different information into one formal essay is an important skill.

Practise this skill by writing a short essay on the importance of wildlife in New Zealand, either in a particular period of its history, or relating to particular animals, birds, fish or marine creatures. Include specific examples from the text.

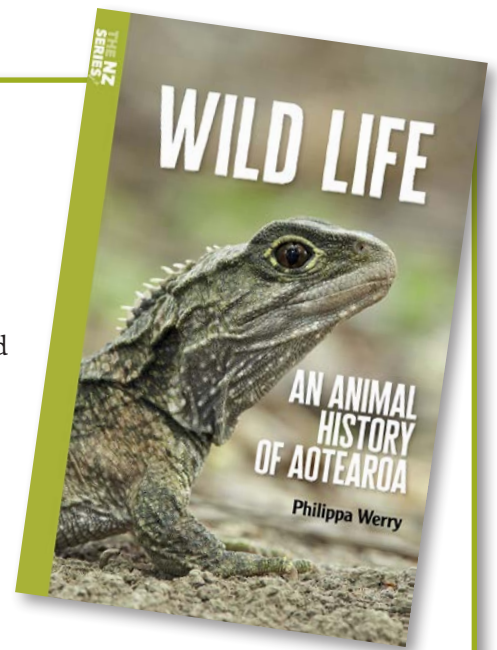
Here is a suggested structure to follow when you write your essay.

- | | |
|---------------------|---|
| Introduction | Briefly outline the topic of the essay and give a short answer to the question (in this case, briefly state how wildlife was a significant part of New Zealand's history in the chosen period, or briefly introduce the particular creature you are focusing on). |
| Paragraph 1 | Give more details, try to use multiple examples from the text so you can provide a range of reasons. Use specific information such as names and dates. |
| Paragraph 2 | Try to use multiple examples from the text so you can provide a range of impacts. Use specific information when discussing your points. |
| Conclusion | A conclusion sums up your answer to the question without introducing any new material. It would be good to include here a final summary statement as to the overall significance, either of wildlife in the chosen period or of this particular species. |

USING THIS RESOURCE IN THE AOTEAROA NEW ZEALAND CLASSROOM

This resource is designed for use in the **Social Sciences** curriculum specifically for years 9–10, but it may be used in **Geology**, **Geography** and **History** classes as well.

The topic of introduced wildlife has close connections with the theme of colonisation and settlement, which has been central to Aotearoa New Zealand's histories for the past 200 years. Colonisation began as part of a worldwide imperial project. It has been a complex, contested process, experienced and negotiated differently in different parts of Aotearoa New Zealand over time, and it has involved animals as well as people. The story of how non-native birds, animals and fish were introduced by European explorers, travellers and settlers into this country is part of the story of colonisation.



USEFUL WEBSITES

Department of Conservation www.doc.govt.nz/

Forest & Bird www.forestandbird.org.nz/

Manaaki Whenua — Landcare Research Group www.landcareresearch.co.nz/tools-and-resources

Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa www.tepapa.govt.nz/discover-collections/read-watch-play/birds-aotearoa-new-zealand

Te Ara: The Encyclopaedia of New Zealand teara.govt.nz/en

New Zealand Birds Online www.nzbirdsonline.org.nz/index

New Zealand Geographic www.nzgeo.com/

Bird of the Year www.birdoftheyear.org.nz/

Bug of the Year bugoftheyear.ento.org.nz/

Fish of the Year www.mountaintosea.org.nz/fish-of-the-year-2025

New Zealand Garden Bird Survey gardenbirdsurvey.nz/

EXTRA READING

Cree, Alison, *Tuatara: biology and conservation of a venerable survivor*. Canterbury University Press, 2014.

Druett, Joan, *Exotic intruders: the introduction of plants and animals into New Zealand*. Heinemann, 1983.

Duval, Lily, *Six-legged ghosts: the insects of Aotearoa*. Canterbury University Press, 2024.

Ell, Sarah, *Lost wonders: vanished creatures of Aotearoa*. Allen & Unwin, 2020.

Gill, Maria, *Remarkable animal stories from New Zealand and Australia*. Scholastic, 2021.

Pascoe, John, *Mr Explorer Douglas*. Revised edition, Canterbury University Press, 2000.

King, Carolyn M., *Invasive predators in New Zealand: disaster on four small paws*. Otago University Press, 2019.

Potts, Annie, Philip Armstrong, and Diedre Brown, *A New Zealand book of beasts: animals in our culture, history and everyday life*. Auckland University Press, 2013.

Sutherland, Alison, *Cook's ark: the animals that sailed with James Cook*. 2019.

Swarbrick, Nancy, *Creature comforts: New Zealanders and their pets: an illustrated history*. Otago University Press, 2013.

Wiffen, Joan, *Valley of the Dragons: the story of New Zealand's dinosaur woman*. Random Century, 1991.

Wolfe, Richard, *Moa: the dramatic story of the discovery of a giant bird*. Penguin, 2003.

Wright, Jan, *Taonga of an island nation: Saving New Zealand's birds*. Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment, 2017.

Yeoman, Anna, *Geckos & skinks: the remarkable lizards of Aotearoa*. Pottton & Burton, 2024.

WATCH AND LISTEN

Choose an episode of *The Aotearoa History Show* that relates to wildlife such as Rabbits and other pests, or Whaling and sealing www.rnz.co.nz/programmes/the-aotearoa-history-show

Watch the short film *Prehistoric life in New Zealand* (1989), 'a tribute to the work of Joan Wiffen, palaeontologist' www.ngataonga.org.nz/search-use-collection/search/F96445/

Watch Sir Paul Callaghan's last public speech on 'The ZEALANDIA vision for a predator-free New Zealand' www.youtube.com/watch?v=noIP5lbuJHk

Watch the northern royal albatross on Royal Cam, a 24-hour live stream of an albatross nest during the breeding season www.doc.govt.nz/nature/native-animals/birds/birds-a-z/albatrosses/royal-albatross-toroa/royal-cam/

Listen to the RNZ podcast *The Deer Wars* www.rnz.co.nz/podcast/deer-wars

Listen to an episode of *Critter of the week* on RNZ

Download and listen to recordings of songs and calls of New Zealand birds www.doc.govt.nz/nature/native-animals/birds/bird-songs-and-calls/



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