

# off the fence.

## Our Big Blue Backyard (Series 3)

6x60'

EPISODIC BREAKDOWN

### 1. Snares/Tini Heke

Deep in the Southern Ocean, the Snares islands are one of the most pristine island wildernesses left on the planet. Every summer, millions of seabirds converge here to breed. More than 50,000 endemic Snares crested penguins battle massive Southern Ocean swells to come ashore. Deep in the forest they find their mates and raise their chicks in a frantic race to take advantage of the short subantarctic summer. On their way to and from the sea, they are hunted by predatory giant petrels and New Zealand sea lions who target the youngest and most vulnerable penguins. As dusk arrives, the skies darken as millions of Sooty shearwaters crash through the canopy on their way to their burrows. At dawn they follow ancient bird paths through the forest to jumping-off points where they pour out onto the sea for their day's feeding, taking advantage of krill swarms that ride the currents. There is no place on Earth like the Snares. To visit here is to step into a world that existed before humans.

### 2. Muaūpoko /Otago Peninsula

On the doorstep of one of the country's biggest cities, Muaūpoko /Otago Peninsula provides a breeding refuge for birds and marine mammals. Northern royal albatrosses return here every year to raise their chicks at the world's only mainland colony. On sheltered beaches around the Peninsula, once hunted from these shores, New Zealand sea lions are returning to form a breeding colony after an absence of centuries. Each day, powerful tidal flows move in and out of the harbour feeding sponges and sea tulips, while swarms of squat lobster provide a feeding bonanza for seabirds. Throughout the summer, red billed gulls, white-fronted terns, and fairy prions all work hard to find a mate and raise their chicks. As the breeding season draws to a close, we watch all of these species race towards adulthood, before finally dispersing into and across the Southern Ocean, secure in the knowledge they will always return to the sanctuary of Muaūpoko, when their own time to breed comes around.

### 3. Top of the South/ Te Tau Ihu

The top of New Zealand's South Island is a landscape of two halves. To the West, one of the longest natural sandbars on the planet curves protectively around Golden Bay. To the East, mountains sink into the sea, their drowned river valleys forming the Marlborough Sounds. Turbulent currents connect them, both treacherous and full of riches. They invite Dusky dolphins to dine alongside New Zealand fur seals in the sounds underwater maze, while below brittle stars and carpet sharks clean up their scraps. Each spring thousands of bar-tailed godwits fly non-stop from Alaska to feast at Farewell Spit. While in the sand dunes a rare katipō spider stands guard

over her precious egg sacs. Long-finned pilot whales cruise into Golden Bay to hunt squid which could cost them their lives. Amidst these turbulent waters Stephen's Island is a haven for an ancient reptile from the time of the dinosaurs. They might live their life in the slow lane, but their Fairy Prion neighbours had better watch out.

#### **4. Te Moananui a Toi/ The Hauraki Gulf**

Te Moananui a Toi/ The Hauraki Gulf lies on the doorstep of New Zealand's largest city. Every summer millions of visitors from the tropics converge here, all lured by a unique seasonal smorgasbord. Giant oceanic manta rays, rarely filmed in these waters, glide into the gulf. Bryde's whales are also primed for the feasting season, alongside common dolphins, and bronze whaler sharks. In the sky above rare black petrels stalk the dolphins to survive. While false killer whales show up seeking their share of the bounty and to renew a unique cross-species friendship. Seventy islands punctuate the gulf, home to some of the rarest birds in the world and in the surrounding waters it's a kaleidoscope of fish, which includes male black angelfish prepare perfectly manicured algae gardens to attract females to lay their eggs. The deep connections all these species have with each other and this way of life which benefits them all, is only possible in the abundant waters of Tikapa Moana o Hauraki.

#### **5. Manawatāwhi/ Three Kings islands**

Where the South Pacific Ocean meets the Tasman Sea, thirteen islands stretch across the blue desert as if a giant has tossed rocks from the sky above, Manawatāwhi/ The Three Kings Islands. Ancient, wild, and remote, this ocean junction bewitches many who visit. Upwellings of cold nutrient rich water support a spectacle of marine life, while a small pod of Bottlenose Dolphins has given up their nomadic ways to make this place their home. Short-tailed stingrays must be wary of visiting orca who would make a snack of them. Great Island hosts a bustling community of terrestrial residents, some found nowhere else, like the Falla's skink and the world's loneliest tree, the Three Kings Kaikōmako. A pit-stop in the vast blue desert for tropical migrants on long haul journeys, giant Sunfish and even a rare swarm of Paper Nautilus pass by on occasion. Whatever brings them here, both visitors and residents alike make the most of Manawatāwhi's strange magic in this place where oceanic currents meet.

#### **6. Cook Islands/ Kūki 'Airani**

It's a miracle the first seafarers ever found the Cook Islands/ Kūki 'Airani scattered across two million square kilometres of the Pacific Ocean. But every year, these tropical islands become the destination for over three thousand Humpback whales who've undertaken one of the longest migrations on the planet. They come here to socialise, mate, and raise their young. On Rarotonga's shores, a group of land-loving fish known as blennies are on a journey just as epic, which offers a glimpse into our evolutionary past as they are in the process of leaving the sea to become landlubbers. The island's reefs offer protection to numerous species including giant clams and green turtles. While in the skies above red-tailed tropicbirds court their mates on the wing, revealing an astonishing aerial ability but to feed their families they will have to avoid pirates. Paradise isn't always what it seems, and an approaching storm could threaten everything.