

Our Big Blue Backyard (Series 1)

EPISODIC BREAKDOWN

1. Northland

As the tide rises in New Zealand's Northland Harbours, Stingrays and Eagle rays swim in to feast on shellfish. But they are not the top of the food chain. Only in New Zealand, and only in these harbours do Orca hunt rays. Trapped in the shallows, the rays breach the surface and swim for their lives, as the Orca pursue – with a highly evolved practice for avoiding the rays' stinging tail. As the tide ebbs, the once underwater world of Northland's mangroves surfaces and seethes. Twisted roots that moments ago sheltered fish are now exposed - a seafood platter for patient Herons, Spoonbills, and Shags.

Our Big Blue Backyard: Northland reveals the unique behavior of a majestic predator and its equally charismatic prey.

2. Goat Island

Just north of New Zealand's biggest city, tens of thousands of fish school meters from the beach in one of the world's first marine reserves. Inside the Goat Island Reserve giant snapper can live for eighty years and crayfish grow to weigh 8 kilos. Both feed on the thousands of sea urchins that graze the kelp forest, maintaining a delicately balanced ecosystem. Like many of the reserve's inhabitants, they entrust their larvae to the ocean currents - so how do they find their way back to the reef when they take on their adult form and settle down?

Our Big Blue Backyard: Goat Island reveals that it's the music of the reef that draws them home. The chorus of munching sea urchins helps fish and crustacean larvae locate the healthy reef ecosystem and swim towards it to renew the cycle of life in the safety of the marine reserve.

3. The Poor Knights

The East Auckland current warms the waters around the world-renowned Poor Knights Islands, creating an astonishing environment. Caves and arches hold the only known congregation of stingrays which stack themselves between underwater walls. Demoiselles and Black Angelfish

fathers protect their eggs with determination, and must keep a watchful eye on neighbors who will raid their nests in an instant! When disaster strikes and the male Sandagers Wrasse disappears, one of the harem of females undergoes a sex change to pick up the missing male's responsibilities. On land, the Tuatara and Giant Weta fuel an ancient feud, while Gannets rest for their next attack.

Our Big Blue Backyard: Poor Knights Islands presents an underwater wonderland full of creatures both mysterious and mischievous.

4. Kaikoura

Just beyond the Kaikoura Peninsula lies a dramatic, 1200-metre deep canyon supplying nutrient-rich food to a bevy of hungry animals above and underwater. The always-playful Dusky Dolphins, New Zealand Fur Seals, and Red-Billed Gulls take advantage of this bounty at an especially important time of year. It's breeding season, and thousands of Red-Billed Gulls form the largest colony in the South Island. Duskie's mate, too, but for fun as well as reproduction. And a Fur Seal finds a magic place while his mother is out at sea.

Our Big Blue Backyard: Kaikoura shows the playful and perilous side of this neighborhood -- from rock pools to deep in the underwater canyon, to the Gull mothers who form an unlikely bond to protect their family unit.

5. Open Bay Islands

It's summer on New Zealand's Open Bay Islands, and the local population swells. Wily octopus, foraging crayfish and darting penguins are joined by over 4,000 New Zealand fur seals. Masterful divers, they successfully straddle two distinct neighborhoods: beneath the waves, where they play and eat – and these rocky outcrops, where they're born and mate.

Mothers balance the demands of nursing pups, mating-keen males, and their own need to efficiently hunt and feed. Everyone here has new mouths to feed, including the scavenging Weka. Unable to fly nor swim, the species was introduced as food for sealers a century ago -- and has been marooned here ever since.

Our Big Blue Backyard: Open Bay Islands witnesses the dangers facing one young pup, starting with her treacherous birth.

6. Stewart Island

Stewart Island, New Zealand's third largest and southernmost island, is a place of dramatic beauty and unpredictability. Here, the Pot-bellied Seahorse father has extra responsibilities, the Octopus is both hunter and hunted, and 82 Great White Sharks need to eat, too. Standing at just 30cm and weighing only 1 kg, the Little Blue Penguin is nonetheless a swift swimmer and a determined parent.

Our Big Blue Backyard: Stewart Island connects the lives of the world's smallest penguin, largest seahorse, a unique beach-going Kiwi family, and a very lucky Shearwater. A resident octopus, however, has a different fate...