

Fast Facts about Albatross

Albatross lifecycles

- Albatrosses pair for life and take many years to find a new mate if their partner is killed – if they find a new partner at all.
- Nature intended the albatross to be long-lived: they live to 60 years and beyond. However, extreme longevity has become rare – the birds face deadly peril in the face of longline fishing.
- Once albatross chicks fledge, they do not return to land for many years. In the case of ‘great’ albatrosses this may be up to 5 years, but they may not start breeding until they up to 10 years old.
- Albatrosses have a low reproductive rate (one egg per breeding season) and many species only breed every other year.
- These long-lived birds, with low reproductive rates, are dying faster than they can re-populate.

Albatross flight

- Wandering and royal (‘great’) albatrosses have the largest wingspans of any bird in the world, reaching up to 3.5m (11ft).
- Albatrosses are among the largest flying birds, weighing up to 10 kilogrammes (25 lbs).
- Albatrosses are miracles of nature’s engineering – their long, narrow wings enable them to glide for thousands of miles on wind currents without flapping their wings.
- Simply by angling their wings and their flight path, albatrosses can use the variation in air speed and direction near the waves to soar over the oceans. This phenomenon is called dynamic soaring.
- This soaring is incredibly efficient, requiring less energy than sitting on a nest.
- Albatrosses are the great ocean wanderers, often flying thousands of kilometres on a single trip to feed their chick.
- The wandering albatross flies up to 10,000 kilometres (6,250 miles) to find food for its chick.
- A grey-headed albatross from South Georgia has been recorded circumnavigating the globe in a mere 46 days!
- Albatrosses depend on strong winds to fly efficiently so the equatorial doldrums acts as a barrier.

- The first evidence of the vast distances covered by albatross was collected in the 1960s when wandering albatross were painted pink and at-sea sightings were recorded.

Where albatrosses are found

- Albatrosses occur in all but one of the world's oceans (the North Atlantic).
- Seventeen of 21 albatross species are restricted to the Southern Ocean.

The problem

- Nineteen of the 21 species of albatross are globally threatened with extinction.
- Albatrosses are being needlessly slaughtered by longline fishing vessels: the birds are attracted to the bait, get hooked, dragged under and drowned.
- Longlines kill more than 100,000 albatrosses and 200,000 other seabirds every year.
- Albatrosses are dying at a rate of around one every five minutes.
- The ancestors of albatrosses evolved 50 million years ago, but it has taken only three decades of longline fishing for many albatross populations to start disappearing.

Practical solutions

- Fishermen can adopt simple and cost effective measures on their boats to keep albatrosses away from the baited hooks, such as:
 1. Bird scattering devices - Using a curtain of plastic streamers dangling from a piece of rope positioned over long lines scares seabirds away from baited hooks.
 2. Chute setting - using underwater chutes from which to run the fishing lines out, so that the line goes into the water out of reach of the birds.
 3. Dyed bait - bait that has been dyed blue makes it harder for birds to see in the water.
 4. Night setting of fishing lines - set fishing lines only at night because most albatrosses feed by day.
 5. Using heavier weights - weighting fishing lines so that the baited hooks sink more quickly.

Source: <http://www.savethealbatross.net/>