

Reading Passage 1 The Albatross



A Albatrosses are the largest seabirds in existence, with wingspans which extend to over three metres in width. They represent a small subset of the larger group known as tube-nosed petrels, which have strong, curved sharp beaks which they use for catching fish and squid on the surface of the ocean. While there is some debate about the exact taxonomy of the species, it is agreed that there are somewhere between 21 and 24 species of albatrosses.

B Of these species, approximately half breed in New Zealand and about 80 per cent breed or fish within New Zealand's territorial waters. Six species breed only in New Zealand or on its offshore islands. One of only two mainland nesting sites for these birds in the world, for the northern royal albatross, is on the Otago Peninsula in the South Island of New Zealand; it is a popular tourist destination. Visitors can view the albatross colony from a special building which has been established beside the nesting ground and, while the site is closed during breeding season, at other times it is often possible to see parents and their chicks living and feeding only metres away from human observers.

C Albatrosses spend most of their lives at sea, coming to land only to mate and raise their chicks. Male and female birds cooperate in raising their offspring. At the Taiaroa nesting site in New Zealand, eggs are laid in October or November each year. Incubation takes about 11 weeks, and during this time both parents take turns to sit on the eggs for periods of up to three weeks, while the other bird goes off to sea to eat. It takes the chicks up to five or six days to hatch from their tough shell. Once they are hatched, the parents take turns in looking after them for about five or six weeks. After this time, they are left alone except for regular feeding until they get their feathers and are ready to fly, at about eight months of age.

D Once the young birds are ready to fly, they are off to sea. Albatrosses spend about 80 per cent of their lives at sea, soaring over the waves and feeding off surface fish and squid. Some albatrosses travel long distances over the pelagic, or deep, ocean, while others find food closer to land over areas of continental shelf. They can fly at great speed, at bursts of up to 140km/hour, and they can cover huge distances in one day, even as much as 1800 km.

E The royal albatrosses at Taiaroa Head stay at sea for the first three years of their lives, after which they return to the colony once a year for several years before finding a mate and beginning to breed at around the age of eight. Albatrosses are faithful birds; they mate for life and raise one chick every two years on average. They are also long lived, and birds have been recorded still

laying eggs into their 50s and even 60s. However, their relatively low reproductive rate is one of the factors which make them vulnerable to the threat of extinction.

F There are also risks to albatross chicks on land. Natural predators such as seagulls can eat eggs and young birds, and in mainland areas there are also threats from dogs, cats and other land animals. On some offshore islands, sea lions have been observed raiding nests for eggs. It is thought that this is a new behaviour.

G The main threats to the adult albatross occur at sea, and most of these are man-made. Albatrosses like to travel close to fishing boats, to eat the leftover scraps of fish that are dropped over the side of the boat. Sometimes, however, they also eat the bait and accidentally ingest fish hooks, or get dragged along on fishing lines and drown. The number of albatrosses that any one boat catches is small, but because there are so many fishing boats, this may have a long term impact on population numbers. It is estimated that at least 100,000 albatrosses die in this way each year. As for all sea bird species, there are other threats, such as drift nets, oil spills and rubbish such as plastic in the ocean. While there are international agreements and fishing conventions to try and protect sea birds, albatrosses are among the million or so sea birds that get caught in drift nets and die each year.

H The albatross is a magnificent, beautiful and awe-inspiring creature. We need to work together to protect this bird and others from threats posed by human activity.

Questions 1-8

The article has 8 paragraphs.

Choose the correct heading for paragraphs 1-8 from the list of headings below.

Write the correct number i-ix after the number of paragraphs in Questions 1-8.

List of Headings

- i. World locations for Albatrosses
- ii. Predators
- iii. Eggs and Chicks
- iv. Major Diseases
- v. Hazards for Mature Albatrosses
- vi. Breeding Patterns
- vii. What is an Albatross?
- viii. The Albatross in Flight
- ix. Why Albatross Matter
- x. A Special Breeding Site
- xi. Conservation Plans

- 1. _____ Paragraph A
- 2. _____ Paragraph B
- 3. _____ Paragraph C
- 4. _____ Paragraph D
- 5. _____ Paragraph E
- 6. _____ Paragraph F
- 7. _____ Paragraph G
- 8. _____ Paragraph H

Answer keys:

1. vii

2. x

3. iii

4. viii

5. vi

6. ii

7. v

8. ix